

身為男高中生兼當紅

輕小說作家

的我，

正被年紀比我小且從事

聲優

的工作

女同學

掐住脖子

時雨沢惠一

Kaiichi Sgsawa

插畫 墨星紅白

Koujirou Kuroda

2

—Time to Play—〈下〉

Kadokawa Fantastic Novels

I'm a High School Boy and a Bestselling Light Novel author, strangled by my female classmate who is my junior and a voice actress 男子高校生で売れっ子ライトノベル作家をしているけれど、年下のクラスメイトで声優の女の子に首を絞められている。

Volume 2 - Time to Play - Second Half

Written by 時雨沢恵一 (Keiichi Sigsawa)

Illustrator by 黒星紅白 (Kōhaku Kuroboshi)

Credits



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身為男高中生兼當紅輕小說作家的我，
正被年紀比我小且從事聲優工作的女同學掐住脖子？
—Time to Play—〈下〉

我搭乘開往東京的特快車，坐在常坐的那個靠窗座位。

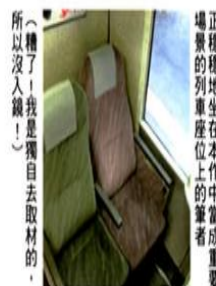
在五月的晴朗藍天下，列車正開始駛動。月台的景色逐漸向後方流動。隔壁的座位是空的，似鳥會來嗎？我知道她會來。

以高中生身分在電擊文庫出書後開始當作家的「我」，以及從事聲優工作的同班同學似鳥繪里，每週都會為了動畫配音工作搭乘這班特快車一次，在車上談論作家的「工作」——這讓我們持續通往無法回頭的終點……

這是直到我最後失去意識前所發生的事，也是個宛如走馬燈的故事。



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時雨沢惠一

2014年是我出道第15年。用年齡來說，就是高中生囉。也可說是「作家高中生」，這感覺跟書名好像。我想要繼續努力到作家20歲。到時候，回顧這一天時，我就會覺得：「我曾經在作者介紹部分寫了蠢事啊……」

【Kadokawa Fantastic Novels】

奇諾の旅 I～XVII

學園奇諾 I～5

艾莉森 I～III 〈下〉

莉莉亞&特雷茲 I～VI

梅格&賽隆 I～VII

那片大陸上的故事 〈上〉〈下〉

身為男高中生兼當紅輕小說作家的我，

正被年紀比我小且從事聲優工作的女同學掐住脖子 1～2

插畫：黑星紅白

我買了電動輔助自行車。即使是上坡路，也能輕鬆前進，所以我覺得能夠騎到稍微遠一點的地方。這樣一來，我也離「旅人」更接近一步了吧。畢竟我也會跟自行車說話啊。

Kadokawa Fantastic Novels

CL0236-02
台灣角川

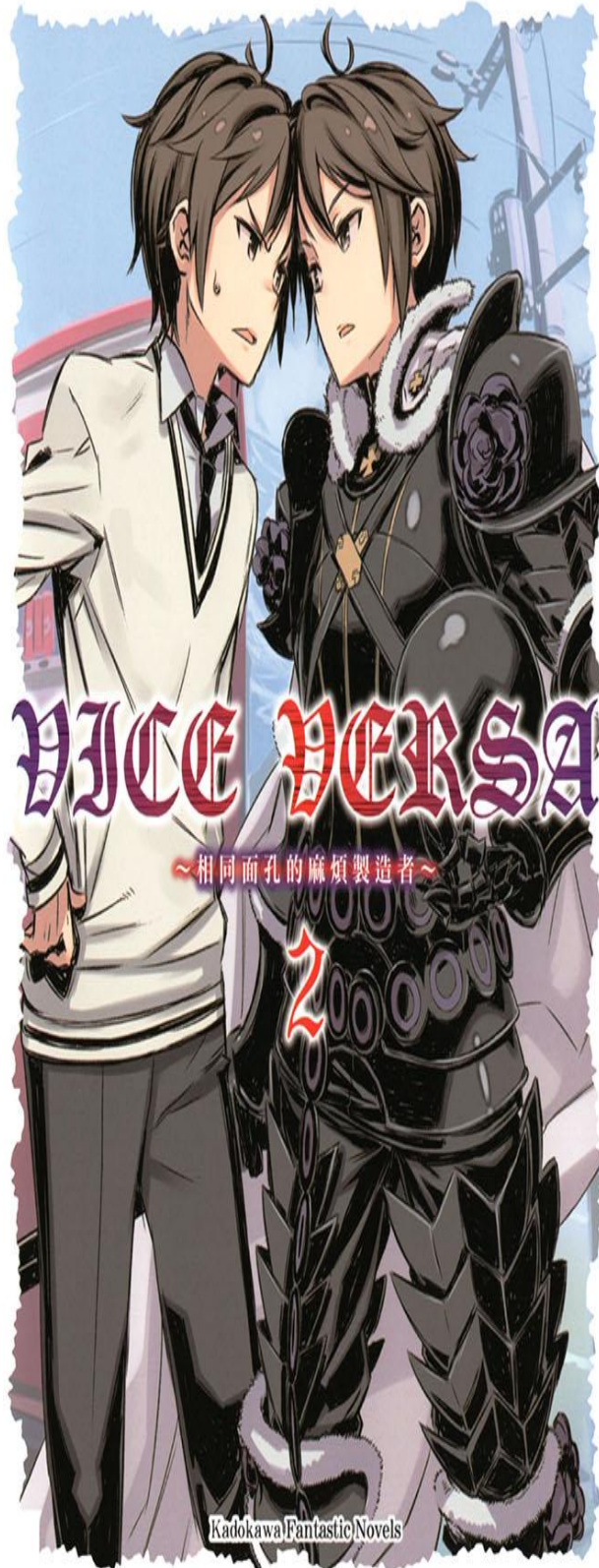
VICE VERSA 2
~相同面孔的麻煩製造者~

搞團真結束在雷普塔西翁那段血腥冒險，返回和平的日本後，卻發現全副武裝的辛竟然被傳送到現代日本！

要是置之不理的話，不曉得辛會幹出什麼好事，因此真很不情願地將辛窩藏在家中。但親眼目睹日本這個異世界後，充滿好奇的辛每天都把真耍得團團轉……

告別與同班同學共度的平靜生活，真與辛的目的地是靈魂安息處，還是拘留所呢？

擁有相同面孔的兩名主角再次在某個地方都市展開冒險！



VICE VERSA 2
~相同面孔的麻煩製造者~

XXXXXX
CL****-02
台灣角川

後記

大家久等了！第二集終於發售了。不過，由於我已經在卷末寫了許多由衷想要在「後記」中傳達的事，所以儘管此處還有篇幅，老實說我已經沒東西可以寫了！各位讀者，請有計劃地利用後記篇幅……



XXXXX

能夠出版續集讓我感到很高興。我還只是個新人，所以我得更加努力才行。我想持續積極地寫作，以期趕上電擊文庫的諸位前輩。我會重視每一字每一句，竭盡全力地創作。

【Kadokawa Fantastic Novels】
VICE VERSA 1~2

插畫：OOOOO

住在東京都，幾乎沒有離開過東京。喜歡暖桌和貓咪。我會全力以赴完成新的工作。

<http://XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX/>



身為男高中生兼當紅

時雨沢惠一
插畫／黑星紅白

輕小說作家的我，



正被年紀比我小且從事

聲優女同學 2

工作的 掐住脖子

—Time to Play—〈下〉

Kadokawa Fantastic Novels



身為男高中生兼
當紅輕小說作家的我，
正被年紀比我小且
從事聲優工作的
女同學掐住脖子

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—Time to Play—〈下〉

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僕は、震まって敬語を使う似鳥より、

「はいこれ / 今日のカツ丼」

ポテトチップスが入った

コンビニ袋を笑顔で差し出してやる

似鳥の方が、好きだ

いや、好きだというのは、

あくまで対比の話だ。

数からのり塩味のポテトチップスと

お茶を出していく僕に、似鳥が言う。

質問を繰り返してさしたんだ。

いろいろ聞きたいことをわ。

こうわ、たくさん思いついてわ



身為男高中生兼當紅
輕小說作家
的「我」
聲優女同學
的工作
正被年紀比我小且從事

時雨沢惠一

Keiichi Sasawa

插畫／黑星紅白
Kouhaku Kuroboshi

2

—Time to Play—《下》

Kadokawa Fantastic Novels

身為男高中生兼當紅輕小說作家的我，
正被年紀比我小且從事聲優工作的女同學抱住脖子
Time to Play

第五章 「五月八日・ 她感動了我」



I'm a High School Boy and a Bestselling Light Novel author, strangled by my female classmate who is my junior and a voice actress.

This is my current predicament.

She—

Eri Nitadori continued to choke the sides of my carotid pulse with her icy hands.

Her hands were really, really cold. I could feel time from the sides of my neck.

I remained prone on the floor, and Nitadori was crouched on me. The only thing appearing in my sights was her upper body.

That would mean her hands reaching at my neck, her face, and the long black hair draped down the sides like curtains.

The backlight dimmed her teary face. It look really tragic.

Having cried so much, the tears gathered on the inside of her glasses, and slowly rained upon my cheeks. The tears fell gently, wetting my face little by little.

Nitadori opened her mouth, probably trying to say something. Once she was done inhaling, she uttered,

"W—"

It's long,

"h—"

In fact, it's probably rather fast.

"y—"

But I guess it's rather slow to my ears.

Why?

Why did things end up like this?

The ghost lights continued to linger in front of my eyes.

May 8, Thursday.

I took the usual Limited Express train from the local station, and sat at the usual seat.

It was the week after Golden Week ended, and the number of passengers riding were obviously fewer than the prior week. I might say it was back to normal.

The weather was clear, but the gusts were strong since morning.

My body shook violently along with the gusts as I waited for the train on the platform. It was said that there were strong winds in Kanto, where I am going to, but I hope the train won't delay because of this.

I hear the announcement in the train before it departed--

I recalled the After Record during the prior week.

Last Friday, at the After Record of the 'Vice Versa'.

Nitadori was dressed in plain clothing easy for moving in, and arrived earlier than the editor-in-charge and me, greeting her seniors over and over again.

Then, the recording began.

The 5th episode of the anime--

The last battle in the first volume of 'Vice Versa' was about to begin.

The first half of the anime episode was dubbed as 'part A', and Shin knew of Sin's struggles.

Sin would only show his tender side to his little sister Ema. In fact, Sin hated war, but understood that only a crusade could save his country.

And so Shin, who unwittingly knew of this, decided to take Sin's place so that Shin's country would not be 'defeated' in battle.

Shin disguised himself as Sin, and deliberately allowed himself to be captured by Pluto's forces.

In the ancient city where the enemy's main army was stationed, Shin was dragged to Pluto--and easily revealed to be an imposter.

We caught Sin! The subordinates were exuberant, but Pluto retorted,

"You fools! He's just an imposter who really looks alike! Does this guy's eyes look like one of a King?"

Shin nodded,

"I suppose."

And Pluto stood in front of Shin, smiling amicably,

"Well, I do praise you for having the guts to sneak in alone."

"Th-thank you very much! Can I head back now?"

"Sure, I shall send you on your way."

And with that, Pluto personally drew the sword, and sliced Shin apart.

His corpse broke apart.

After that was the commercial.

The anime After Record--

Before recording every main segment, they would have rehearsals, (Typically, it would be twice, but if the recording time they arranged for at the studio was insufficient, they would go through with once), actual recording, checks for mistakes, and preview records.

I don't know how it goes for other anime, but this is the case for 'Vice Versa'.

The break after Part A's recording was about to end.

They were about to start recording 'Part B'.

At the beginning of part B, Meek finally spoke for the first time.

This pretty glasses girl who sits behind me in class, who sat beside me in the train the day prior, and loves horse sashimi--

Had the script in hand, facing the thick soundproof glass, standing in front of the microphone.

Right beside her is a famous male voice actor playing the role of Shin. He's rather handsome, has amazing acting skills, and practically had no NGs in the recording of part A.

I--

And most of the people there realized it.

Nitadori's script was shaking terribly.

Of course, the script of paper and ink wouldn't shake on its own.

Nitadori's left hand was shaking slightly.

The left hand wasn't shaking much, but the front end of the script was shaking rather hard.

Nitadori's mouth was opened slightly, and she appeared to be muttering something.

Even the powerful microphone could not pick up on the voice, so I guess she probably was just muttering in her mind. This continued on for a while.

Her hands were shivering, her mouth moving as though she was chanting a spell.

I wondered how nervous Nitadori really was--

I was in a safe zone buffered by a layer of class, and I couldn't comprehend that at all.

It was the first time she was voicing a named character.

The first scene where her character would speak.

And inside this studio, the one who really 'wanted to run away at this moment'--

Was me.

But no matter my thoughts, the monitors everywhere aired the animation.

The production of the anime 'Vice Versa' appeared to have gone really well, and most of the animation was already comparable to the quality of the actual broadcast (though without the voices).

I heard from the editor-in-charge that this was a rare occurrence.

It was said that during the After Record of most anime, the visuals showed--

Would typically be the moments of the characters, uncolored, or hand-drawn manga styled straight from the storyboard.

In such moments, they would use the character names and marks to indicate the moments the voice actors are to speak.

According to an editorial I saw on a magazine, if the anime is complete, it would be much easier for the participating voice actors to follow the expressions of the characters.

Part B--

At the beginning of that scene was Meek, pushing a wheelbarrow that contained the severed parts of Shin.

The location was the dark basement of the castle, where nobody else was at.

Meek was obeying her master's orders, silently pushing the wheelbarrow to dump the corpse.

She threw Shin's corpse into an underground drain that acted as the waterway, and there were several ploops heard.

Meek was about to return after she was done with her mission, but she turned around upon hearing water, and found Shin revived--

"KYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYAAAAA!!!!"



Meek's first line was a shrill, long, long, long scream.

In the novel's narration, I wrote,

"Her scream shook all the stones forming the tunnel"

I liked seeing all kinds of animation, and viewed the voice actors as stars.

So, during the 5 weeks I observed the After Record, I was so happy that I forgot I was working, and I enjoyed the actors' performances as much as I could.

The performance of these famous voice actors is really amazing, and I feel really moved every week to be able to personally witness their performance.

And then--

As for that rookie voice actress who is younger than I am, the girl was so nervous, her hand was shivering all this time.

"KYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYAAAAA!!!!"

Her performance did not move the underground rocks, but instead, moved something deep within my heart.

I didn't remember exactly when Nitadori's hand stopped shaking.

The shaking of a script couldn't be recorded, so she probably regained her composure before the recording began.

I was completely mesmerized by her vocal performance that was displayed before my eyes.

Shin, who was supposed to be a corpse in pieces, revived after his body dipped in the water, and he emerged from it.

Why did he take so long to revive? The readers would often comment when it came to this point. My main focus back then was to express, and back then, I didn't notice this part at all.

Also, since Shin was chopped up, the clothes on his body fell off, so in this scene, Shin was naked.

Stark naked as he stood in front of her.

"..."

Meek shrieked, and fell limp on the floor, remaining silently.

Normally, in a novel, this will be passed off as an ellipsis--

But in an anime, a voice actor will use a breath to indicate the reason why a character is remaining silent. In this situation, all Meek felt was fear.

I heard Nitadori's breathing as she shivered due to fear.

"Arghh! It's cold! I'm freezing!"

And Shin deliberately said such exaggerated words so that this girl (though she's a homunculus) who's timidly looking up at him wouldn't feel scared.

"Erm, sorry for scaring you--eh, woah!"

Then, Shin realized that he was naked, but there was nothing that he could use to cover his body.

"It's cold!"

Shin had his back turned on Meek, rubbing his body with both arms.

Till this point, I saw that Shin's crotch was nicely covered by Meek's body or the torch on the wall--

Looks like a little bare butt is okay.

Then, Meek asked,

"A-are...you not going to kill me?"

Instead, Shin turned back, asking with a dumbfounded look.

"Hm? Why?"

"I'm your enemy...I intend to kill you."

Meek slowly stood up, and finished her words.

"Ah...well, but...I guess that's fine. Go ahead if you want to kill me. That'll be useless though, so I don't really recommend that you do that..."

"...?"

"Well, I'm immortal...in this world...you can tell, right?"

Meek stared at Shin for quite a while. The color of the beautiful eyes are different, one wine red, and one yellow, and they are emphasized.

And then, Meek was on the verge of tears saying,

"If only I can't die...if that happens, I can continue to fight on and protect my master..."

"Humans are born, and fated to die. This goes for me too, but my presence here is just an exception...I just came to this world for a little while...I don't have any idea as to how I'm to head back to my own world..."

And upon hearing Shin's sad reply, Meek's voice became harsher.

"But I'm not human!"

"...?"

Shin tilted his head.

From here on, Meek let out a long spiel of words.

Meek was smiling, but it was not one of happiness, instead being one born of anguish.

"I'm a Homunculus, a created being—not a human!"

"..."

"Please look at these eyes! The left and right eyes are different in color! This is the proof of a homunculus...you probably don't know that, do you? The materials used to create us are gathered from corpses. When we are created, we are granted with only one eye. We are then brought to our masters...and we have a gemstone put inside. That is the other eye. The gem eye is a proof of loyalty, and a symbol of one not being a human!"

When she rattled off with this long line of words, shown on the screen is a terrifying scene of the 'eye embedding moment'.

It probably would be too grotesque to be shown directly, so the anime displayed it through silhouettes.

"I'm a homunculus, only to live for my master..."

Meek's monologue.

She muttered as she slowly put her hands at the back of her waist. Over there were her favorite daggers that were cross sheathed.

A flashback aired, showing Meek's past.

In the visuals, the others showed her some curious stares, looking at her as though she was a monster. In the town, she was scorned mercilessly by the people around her, and occasionally, brutalized without reason.

About this part—

Even I thought it was 'too dark'.

The homunculus in 'Vice Versa' were typically unfortunate.

They were born to be slaves, and had to obey their master's orders. Due to their unique eyes, anyone around them would be able to determine who they were, and not think of them as human.

Homunculus had far superior athletic abilities than humans, and if they had that intent, they could easily kill any master who was careless, but they could not do so. That is because their hearts were infused with the order 'to absolutely serve their masters'.

Because of such characteristics, the people who became the masters of the homunculus would typically think of them as 'puppets with a conscience'.

Well, I did write the relationship between Pluto and Meek (This has to do with the fact that Pluto's actually female) as a beautiful relationship between master and servant.

Pluto's personality was that of cruelty and lack of mercy. She viewed all subordinates as equal, be they homunculus or human.

In other words, she would call out to her subordinates however she wanted, and they would do their best to fulfill her orders.

Shin heard Meek's words with his butt facing her, and turned around.

Shin really wanted to tell her something, so he forgot that he was completely naked, saying with utter seriousness.

“Please don't be so frustrated about comparing yourself with other people. You—are you after all.”

Meek's hands were weakly slumped, not holding anything.

“...”

She was viewed as a 'human' for the first time in her life, and widened her heterochromia eyes.

“Ugh, it's cold...”

To settle a showdown with Pluto, Shin walked off while feeling really cold.

In the strategy both Shin and Sin came up with, Shin was to create a ruckus, die, and revive, and then die again, causing chaos in the enemy camp. He's the main character, but his actions feels like some zombie or some demon king in a horror flick.

Shin moved on to completely his mission.

“Wait!”

Meek called out with a serious voice. It was sudden, and Meek was different from before, not using any formalities. This was the first time Meek spoke like that.

“...”

So a fight is inevitable? Shin turned around sadly, but saw Meek take off the muffler on her neck, handing it to him, saying,

“Please...use this...”

“Eh?”

Shin hesitated for a while, and then smiled,

“Oh!”

He immediately beamed, and took the muffler with both hands, but right when he was about to put it on his waist—

“I guess it has to be like this after all.”

He wrapped it around his neck.

The protagonist—

Was naked, wearing only a muffler.

Of course, I actually wrote the story with this in mind.

In fact, after it was animated, it did look rather hilarious. He really looked like an unabashed pervert there.

Laughter could be heard from the control room.

“Thanks, it's warm.”

Shin beamed at Meek.

“Next, I want some pants...”

Shin muttered as he began running.

“...”

I let go of Master's enemy. But I've completed the mission of 'dumping off the corpse, and Master never commanded me on what to do after that. But that man's Master's enemy, but he treats me as a person, but—

“...”

Meek was starting to feel conflicted, and she let out some white breath, watching him leave.

Right in front of her eyes was a shaking butt.

Nitadori made no mistakes in her lines during the rehearsal.

The sound director gave all kinds of instructions, but as an amateur, I did not know what was the problem.

After some instructions, the sound director asked me,

“Sensei, is there any problem with Meek's parts?”

“None!”

I immediately answered.

After that, everyone made a rehearsal, and the official voice work began—

As for me, all I did was watch and just let myself be moved, shouting in my heart 'wow, it's amazing'.

I suppose that if I had turned around during Nitadori's recital, I would be able to see Nitadori as she was. However, work was different from class after all—

Wondering that, I observed the performance of these professional voice actors.

Something else also happened on that day.

It was when the recording ended.

I chatted with the anime makers and the editor-in-charge for a little while, so I left the control room a few minutes later.

I exit the studio lobby, and found the voice actor portraying Shin talking with Nitadori by the wall.

It was a scene of a senior talking to a junior, but Nitadori had her head slightly lowered, and she did not look right.

It might not be an appropriate choice of words, but I had the mental image of 'a handsome voice actor flirting with a female high school girl'.

When this voice actor was confirmed to be playing as Shin, I searched through the internet—

'A handsome guy who has scandals with many voice actresses'.

I managed to find a website that contained such rumors, and looked through all of them.

There were many exploits on the website, but I did not know how truthful they might be. Besides, I decided not to believe in internet rumors that easily (if I do, my real identity will probably be 'an experienced female author in her 30s who writes with a different pen name and loves BL works.)

Personally, I don't hate this voice actor.

I think that his voice and acting skills are brilliant, really suited to act as Shin, who starts off timid, only to gradually get stronger.

But when I see him talk with Nitadori happily—

This voice actor just feels like some evil wizard aiming to bring Nitadori to another world I don't know of.

But even so, this isn't something I could gossip about, so it was fine.

I told the editor-in-charge,

"I'll be going first then."

This was a line that could be used at any given situation, and right when I was about to pass by them,

"Ah, sensei! Please wait!"

The voice actor spoke to me directly. The voice was exactly the same as Shin's, so I thought I entered the world of 'Vice Versa'.

I stopped, turned around, and he asked,

"Yo, what do you think of her performance?"

Her, in this case, would refer to Nitadori. As for performance, it would refer to her acting.

I was surprised, but Nitadori appeared to be more surprised.

"..."

Her eyes were widened more than before, and it felt as though her eyes were about to pop out from her glasses frame.

I merely glanced aside at Nitadori, and immediately turned my glance to the handsome, pristine face of the voice actor.

“Really amazing.”

I answered earnestly, with no sense of pretense at all.

That voice actor isn't a mirror, so I can't tell what sort of face I made back then.

And I don't understand why that voice actor would suddenly smile like that.

“Of course, isn't it? I was telling Nitadori about this.”

But the voice actor then said,

“I do remember that you're 17, sensei?”

I nodded, and he then pointed his palm at Nitadori, saying,

“I heard that she's 16. It's really unbelievable. Both of you are way too young.”

And then, he lamented,

“From now one...it'll be the era of you youngsters...”

No wait. This guy should be 25.

Before I can understand his words while I remain rooted, this voice actor said,

“Nitadori. This sensei will be writing stories that will get animated. I know sensei has that kind of foresight from his scent. All I have are sharp ears, and a decent appearance. In other words, you might be in sensei's care from now on, so you should take the opportunity to shake hands with sensei now, and increase your chances of interacting.”

He said some words I couldn't comment on, and prompted Nitadori to reach her right hand.

Nitadori slowly reached her slender right arm.

“I'm a rookie, and I'll continue to work hard to play as Meek. Please continue to take care of me.”

“...”

After much struggle, I manage to reach out and hold her hand.

Besides, in this life of mine, I have never held a girl's hand before.

“Th-thank you.”

Saying that, I touched Nitadori's hand.

It was really, really—

Cold.

And while I was immersed in my thoughts.

"Yahoo!"

Nitadori was seated beside me before I knew it, and we were so close that I could feel her breathing when she greeted me, startling me.

"Woah!"

I let out a strange squeal, twitching my body, and ended up hitting my back against the wall. Nitadori laughed, and asked,

"What language is that?"

"..."

While the train accelerated gradually...

I recalled the sight of that Nitadori last week, and compared it to the her this week. This difference between them really confused me.

No. I do know both of them are Eri Nitadori.

I do understand that the one wandering between different worlds is me.

"Sensei, you're giving a distant look. After you think about anything? Is it about the next work?"

"Well, I guess."

I immediately replied. It was a lie, but the reply was smooth. No, this can't really be considered a lie after all; I can insist that everything I'm thinking is about the plot of my next work. It'll be fine if the topic of my next light novel is 'my classmate is a voice actress'.

"Wow, so cool; just like an author."

"..."

"Eh? Where's the usual reply?"

"...I'm an author after all."

"Good good."

Rather than Nitadori who's using formal language out of respect,

"Hello. Over here! It's Katsudon for today!"

I prefer the Nitadori who hands me the plastic bag filled with potato chips with a smile on her face.

Well, I suppose the term like is mostly a matter of contrast.

I pulled out a bag of salt flavored potato chips and tea from the bag, and Nitadori said,

"I got a list of questions. Since I have lots of things to ask, I went ahead to remember."

"It's like a magazine interview, isn't it? To be honest, you really helped me out here. I've been wondering about what I should talk about today?"

"Wow. Thanks for that."

Nitadori took out a little notebook, and opened it.

I had a little glance, and those are some nice words.

"Ah!"

Nitadori hides the questions from me, probably because she doesn't want me to know beforehand.

I guess anyone will be hungry at this moment, and I graciously munch on the chips and drank the tea.

I did ask Nitadori if she wanted to have some, but as before, she didn't take one.

I guess it's because it's a gesture to treat me? Or that she's refusing politely because she's worried about looking bad if she's to eat on the train? Or that--she already ate a packet before she boarded?

I don't know her actual intent (I guess I don't have to think about that last guess), but I can't force her to eat. I indulge myself in a third of the packet, tied it up, and drank some tea.

"Now then--fire away with the questions."

And I say this inside this train that's moving on against strong headwinds.

There's about 3 hours till our destination, and I guess we can have a really long conversation here.

"First off, I don't know...actually, I don't know whether I can ask this question..."

It's rare for Nitadori to stammer like this.

"Eh? Erm..."

In case of whatever question it may be, I prepare myself.

Nitadori sounds a little apologetic as she continues,

"Eh, I thought...I shouldn't be asking such questions. But I'm still curious about it no matter how I tell myself this."

What exactly does Nitadori want to know about me? Feeling terrified, I shivered a little--

"Ah."

I immediately thought of a few possibilities. If that's it, I heave a sigh of relief inside.

And then, I asked, just in case,

"Maybe--it's about my earnings?"

"Are you an esper...?"

Nitadori answered in surprise.

"No, I'm an author."

First, I answer that, and then, Am I wrong? I quipped.

Nitadori looked a little embarrassed as she answered,

"That's right...it's about money...I know it's rude manners to ask this question."

And then, she showed me a determined look,

"But since I finally managed to find someone who knows about this, I want to ask if he agrees to it. I feel that in my future life, I won't be able to find anyone willing to answer me such questions."

And while Nitadori's showing such an intense will,

"Yeah, sure."

I promptly answered.

The matter of asking someone else about his earnings was truly rude, and even I, a high school boy, know about this.

The following is all off-topic--

In the country of New Zealand, famous for their sheep, one simply does not ask a farm owner how many sheep they had. That is because it appeared that people could estimate the earnings through the number of sheep they have.

That was a trivia I read in a miscellaneous magazine, and I don't know if it's real or not. However, if I'm to go travelling there, I might try asking such questions, so I think it's better for me to pay attention to this.

Back to the point.

I do know it's rude to ask others of their earnings.

But I also know that there are those driven by curiosity to understand the earnings of the unique jobs.

Since I was young, I too wanted to know about an author's earnings. What did it mean to 'live on royalties', and how much tax to pay.

When I became an author myself, earned the publishing fees and the experiences of declaring my earnings, I gradually began to understand them.

About my income--

Obviously, I can't talk about this with people who don't know that I'm an author; if the other party knows that I'm an author, I do feel that I can treat it as a normal conversation.

Leaving aside my mother, till this point, I often discussed this topic bluntly with the senior authors during the refreshments after meetings at the editorial branch, and the end-of-year parties over the past two years.

Of course, we weren't just doing this to satisfy our curiosity.

When my books started to sell well, the senior authors began to tell me about tax reductions.

Some of them blatantly told me of their yearly earnings (as what the words implied, the top selling authors' earnings are really on a different scale from the rest.)

I won't tell anyone of their yearly earnings. At the same time, I don't think Nitadori will let slip whatever I told her.

And besides, I don't think that Nitadori's approaching me for the sake of money.

Or I should say, though it's just a guess--

I get the feeling that Nitadori's family is really rich.

Upon hearing my answer,

"Really? About that money..."

The bespectacled Nitadori asked with a worried look on her face.

"Yeah, sure. Well, basically, keep this--"

"I won't say it out! I promise!"

She answered before I can finish my sentence.

Having decided to tell Nitadori, I scanned the train carriage as a precaution.

The train today is rather empty, and only two people are seated at the seats right at the front.

An author's earnings.

As anyone would know, an author's earnings is mainly derived by the publication fees of a book.

Also, there appears to be a 'manuscript fee' for publications in a magazine or a newspaper, a 'speaking fee' for speeches, 'source fee' and 'copyright fee' for an anime or movie adaptation, but I never received them.

The anime is yet to be completely made, so I've yet to receive the fees regarding this.

"Because of that, the scale of this will be the publishing fees in this company. Or to be precise, I'll only talk about publishing fees."

"Yep."

"Now then, before I talk about how much the publishing fee is--I'll like to talk about the definition."

"It's a Royalty, no? The publisher will be printing your work in books, sensei, so this money is a 'copyright fee' for you."

"Yep. That's impressive."

"Actually, I did research through the internet when I designed the questions. I did check on why it's called 'publishing fee'! It's not a tax, is it?"

As Nitadori had mentioned, the publishing fee isn't a tax.

Back when a publisher printed volumes, they would stick some kind of an author's stamp on the last page called a 'colophon', something called an 'inspection stamp'. (Some do stamp it directly on the book). The publisher will use the number of inspection stamps, and pay the money to authors directly.

This system is similar to 'printing fees', (like giving tax to the author), it is also called 'publication printing fee', and then simplified as 'publication fee'.

On a side note, this 'publication printing fee'--refers to the amount of money to be paid when producing books. Authors with works in book form are paid according to the 'publication fee' pro-rata to the price plastered on the book.

In the end, people gave up on such a troublesome method, and chose not to go with inspection printing, so the method was scrapped.

In books that are slightly older, their back ends will contain the words 'inspection stamp is scrapped'. I did see them in an antiquarian bookshop.

"Well, even if I don't know that kind of history...anyway, the publisher will give the author a royalty known as 'publishing fee'--and the money is pro-rated "

"Uh huh, so how much is it, roughly?"

"Normally, the fee is around 10% or so. My situation is the same, and excluding the sales tax, 10% of the book price will be the publishing fee."

"Always?"

"I don't know if it'll change in the future. Of course, I do hope that it'll increase. I did hear that the rates for those extremely popular authors do increase, but I'm not sure what the actual situation is."

"I get it. Then, I'll use this 10%. In other words, if the book's sold, the fixed rate of 10% will be your earnings, right, sensei?"

Nitadori asked to confirm, but I shook my head.

"No, that's not it."

"Eh?"

It was not about 'once the book was sold'.

It was about 'once the book was printed'.

The book would first be printed, and the meaning of that would be equivalent to 'being made into a commercial product'.

And,

"The number of volumes printed will determine the revenue."

"Then, for an extreme example--"

I knew what Nitadori was trying to get at, so I continued from her words, saying,

"Assuming that a book has 100,000 copies printed. The publisher estimates that the book can sell about that much--however, the book couldn't sell after it was printed, and in fact, only 5 copies were sold."

"That's really drastic! That means that he and his family were the only ones who bought that book, right?"

Nitadori giddily grinned as she said that, but after saying those words, I felt a little heartbroken within. How would that author feel? There's a chance that even I may end up like that.

Well, my books are selling well, so I won't mention it for now. I continue on,

"But the author is able to get the publishing fee of 100,000 copies. Assuming that a book is sold for 500 Yen, 10% of that would be 50 Yen, and multiply that by 100,000, that'll be 5,000,000 Yen."

"Eh...I never knew that before. I always thought it was counted based on sales amount."

"Allow me to say that I heard that such a system actually exists. Dengeki Bunko however counts this through printed volumes."

Then, assuming that I get the publication fee that's 10% of the book price.

As the name implied, Dengeki Bunko is a paperback publisher. As for what a paperback is, it'll drag on, so I decided to omit it--anyway, it's a really small book.

The price of a paperback light novel ranges from 500 to 700 Yen. The prices is dependent on several factors, and the easiest to understand will be--

"The book thickness? Number of pages?"

"Of course, I won't know the actual numbers of the prices, pages and volumes. That was what the editor-in-charge told me when I asked him on the pricing."

"So the pricing isn't done by you, the author, sensei?"

I shook my head, saying,

"It's decided by the editorial branch...or rather, the publisher. But as I said, the thinner the book, the cheaper it is. Using the series 'Vice Versa' as an example, the price is typically around 600 pages. Actually, I wanted to make the book cheaper..."

"Eh--why!?"

Nitadori was really surprised.

It's not unreasonable for her to be so shocked. If the book is pricer when sold, the author's income will increase accordingly.

But even so, I state my actual thoughts.

"Well...it's because the main demographic of light novels are Middle schoolers and high school students, and there are younger kids in elementary school who will read them. I feel that readers

do buy the books using their pocket change, so even if it's cheaper by 10 Yen, it'll make them happy."

"Ah...now that you mention it, that's true. The more I like such books, the more I want to look at other works."

A thicker book would have more ample content. Even as an author, I do find it worth it to write it, However,

"I saved up, and I'm finally able to buy a new volume!"

Even so, when I do receive such comments from a fan younger than me--

I do feel that it's a good thing, even if it's 10 Yen cheaper.

Of course, I hope to attract more people to buy the books with a lower price, and increase the final sales volume (and earnings).

I said before that I do increase the number of paragraphs to improve the readability. Because of that, I do often feel a dilemma.

I continue on with the publishing fee.

"The book price is determined by all kinds of factors. The publishing fee is set at 10% pro-rata, and to calculate the earnings, there is one factor left--"

"The volume!"

"Yep."

"But how is the number of volumes set...?"

When talking about printing volumes, we'll be talking about income.

For an author, the total income = all the publishing fees receive. It's the same case as with the sheep in New Zealand.

While I intend to explain this, the Train Conductor arrived. It's a man today.

As usual, we show our tickets for him to stamp.

The explanation was paused, and I took a little breather, drinking some tea.

The conductor left, and there were no new passengers sitting next to us.

I begin to wonder, how exactly do I begin explaining the printing volumes--

And then, I realized that I had yet to explain what is the printing volume.

"Erm...I've been mentioning this 'printing' volume for a while..."

"Yes."

"The printing volumes can be classified as 'initial printing', 'reprints', and 'total prints'."

"Hmmm?"

Nitadori frowned, looking perplexed.

"I'll explain in order--"

The initial print refers to the number of volumes printed for the first time. If it is a profitable work, like a serialized sequel, there will be more volumes printed in initial print.

The reprint refers to the additional printed volumes due to the printed book being popular.

And as the name implied, the total volumes referred to the total of the initial print and the reprints till this point. However, the total volumes will be classified as 'total volumes for this particular volume', 'total volumes for this particular series', and 'total volumes for this particular author'.

"I see. I often hear reports in the news of 'a certain bestselling novel reaching a million copies, yet the initial print was a few thousands', and such."

"Such books weren't much of a topic, and once they got hot, they were printed over and over again, and it ended up like that. The reprint volumes might even reach a few thousands in an instant."

"So in other words, there's no fixed figures for the initial print volumes and reprint volumes?"

"Right. The initial print is determined by several factors. If it's a popular series by a renowned author, the number of printed volumes will increase."

For an author, the more volumes in the initial print, the happier they will be.

There are two reasons for it. First off--

"The more volumes printed, the more copies that can be displayed in the bookshop in one go, and the book will be bought easily."

"A book that's easily bought will be much more likely to be popular."

Another reason was that the publication fee will increase (Of course, this refers to the number of printed volumes.)

"Thus, authors do work hard every day, praying for the initial print numbers to increase."

"Praying is important, since wishes do come true--so, sensei, how many copies of the first volume of 'Vice Versa' was printed?"

Leaving aside the number of reprints--

I'll talk about the first printing of volumes.

"The first volume of 'Vice Versa', the initial number of copies was 27,000."

"Is that...a lot? Little, right?"

Nitadori asked. It's a question to be expected.

Anyone unfamiliar with the industry won't have an idea of context with regards to this number. Speaking of which, when the editor-in-charge told me of this figure at first, I too timidly asked the same question.

And the editor-in-charge answered,

"It's about the same as the works of those who won awards in the Dengeki Novel Prize award! You didn't get an award, but the starting speed is the same!"

Nitadori exclaimed happily,

"Amazing! That's decent!"

"Yeah. To be honest, I'm rather happy."

I casually mention about this--but I heard from authors working under other publishers that the number of 27,000 is 'quite a lot'. It's Dengeki Bunko, so they can sell this much.

That author said that his debut work had less than 20,000 copies, and also said that the difference is due to the power of Dengeki Bunko, who had the largest stake in the industry. Of course, I never told Nitadori about any of this.

The factors leading to improved sales after a volume is published is of course down to an author's own ability. He taught me the important logic 'that if a really interesting story is written, it'll be popular'.

Leaving that aside, i continue with my own words.

"And then, 27,000 copies worth of publishing fee entered my pockets. The price of the first volume is 590 Yen."

"In other words..."

Nitadori began to ponder beside me, while I went the old fashioned way of relying on a tool of civilization. I don't have the mental capability to be able to calculate such numbers.

I took out the smartphone from my pocket, unlocked the screen, and activated the calculator.

Then, I quickly tapped in the numbers.

$590 * 0.1 * 27,000$, so the answer is 1,593,000 (in Yen).

The moment I intended to say this number.

"It's 1,593,000 Yen, isn't it?"

Nitadori simply said.

"Eh?"

I let out a surprised voice, and turned my head to the right.

"Hm? That isn't it?"

Nitadori nonchalantly asked.

"No...that's right."

Nitadori's hands were not holding a cellphone, and her notebook was closed.

Even if she wanted to peek into my smartphone screen, she couldn't. I often had inspiration of creation on the train, so I had a protective film on the screen to prevent people from peeking.

In that case, there's only one possibility.

"Did you just...do a mental sum?"

"Yep?"

"How...?"

"Multiply by 30,000, and I'll get 1,770,000, and then take 10% off."

"Ah, yes, I see..."

Hearing her say this, it seemed calculation wasn't that tough--

No, it's still not easy.

The time she spent doing mental sum is the same as me using a smartphone? How smart is Nitadori exactly?

"Amazing..."

I marvel earnestly, muttering,

"Yep, I feel the same too."

Nitadori then nodded her face and glasses, beaming as she answered,

"Huh?"

"1.5 million is a huge sum."

"Ah, you're referring to that...?"

"Hm?"

The train raced forth against the headwinds

Other than the noise outside the train, there was the occasional howling of the winds. Till this point, there were no stalling on the train ride.

Well, I guess that's better than the train flipping around. I just need to reach Tokyo tonight.

"I guess...1.5 million is a large sum..."

I forgot about the 'huge misunderstanding' both Nitadori and I had, and blurted out my real thoughts.

For me, a first year in high school, 1.5 million is really a large sum. Speaking of which, I remembered that when I did the calculations back then, I found the number to be so surreal, I nearly fainted from shock.

"I can buy a car with that!"

I yelled alone in that room.

Even though I did not have a license.

Before I continued with the explanation, I thought of something I forgot. It's something pretty minor, but I decided to talk about it for the time being.

"Sorry. There's something I made a mistake about. In fact, I didn't get the publishing fee for 27,000 volumes."

"Eh?"

Nitadori looked more surprised than I thought, so I panicked,

"Ah, no...it's not some serious mistake. It's about 27,000 copies worth! To be precise...I got '26,950 copies' worth of the publication fee."

"Then...where did the 50 copies go to? For the Angels?"

"No...it's not wine."

I didn't know if Nitadori was serious or just joking around, and it didn't matter, but I made a little retort. This 'Angel offering' refers to the evaporated portion of wine when brewing wine using a wooden barrel.

"But both of them might be the same."

"How so?"

"Those 50 books are used as samples. You can think of them as books that can't be sold, so they won't count as part of a publication fee. Of course, I don't know if the other editorial branches do use the same standard."

"I see. So the Angels are the editorial branch!?"

"But, well...it's tough to calculate, so I thought I'll explain this with the 1.5 million Yen calculated from the 27,000 copies."

"Got it!"

And thus, that was the first sum of publishing fee I obtained in my life. As for when, and how I obtained this money--

"Of course, it's through a banking transaction. The editor-in-charge asked me for my bank account, and I told him that I didn't have one, so he told me, 'go open one then'. So, I went to a major bank branch to open a bank account. The big sister at the counter taught me a lot of things back then, and asked me 'have you started working part-time'?"

The moment I mentioned this, Nitadori's eyes got sharp, and she quickly changed her tone.

"Hey~that's not some part-time work. This is a professional author debuting at Dengeki Bunko, you know? A respected sensei at work, you know?"

If Nitadori was to accompany me to open the bank account, would she really say such a thing? Just imagining such a scene alone is interesting to me.

"Ahaha--no no, how can I divulge my identity?"

"Ahaha--so, what next?"

The first time an unnatural amount of money was suddenly deposited into this account that only had 1,000 Yen was--

The following month after the first volume was sold, the end of September.

Just a little moment before then, I received a postcard from ASCII Media Works.

I flipped the attached part, and found that there was a 'payment slip'.

Recorded on it was the 'title', 'number of revisions', 'account items (publishing fees or draft fees, and so on)', 'summary (number of volumes, money, printing rates)', and all kinds of information.

Of course, it included the sum of money.

"It's the amount just now, right?"

"No, less than that."

"Why?"

"Because there's a need to deduct tax."

Once I start getting into details on this, this will get really long, so I simply told her the amount of money I received.

Before the money (publication fee) enters my account, the 'income tax' will be deducted first. This is called 'tax withholding', a tax system the country does to prevent taxpayers from evading tax.

The deductible would differ based on earnings, so I can't generalize this.

That's because the 'tax' will increase based on earnings. The higher the earnings, the higher the tax rates. This is the system they call 'cumulative tax rates'.

"I'll leave aside the difficult part. The income tax will be deducted from the publication fee before it's given to me. So, I have to work hard and report the amount of tax I have to the government...I'll talk about that later."

I think that there's still 'this thing' I have to explain--

For the time being, I continue to explain the earnings of an author.

"Once the tax is deducted, part of the first volume publication fee was transacted into my account successfully, and I felt really happy."

"Congratulations!"

"Th-thank you. But thanks to you, 'Vice Versa' is selling really well, and there was already a reprint at that moment."

"If it's as what you said, it refers to printing more copies, right?"

"Right. The readers will read the books displayed in the shop. When the book is selling well, the bookshop will tell the 'distributor', 'please provide more of this book'."

""Distributor', as in?"

"Erm...the official name is 'publishing distributor', and it refers to the dealers who provide the flow between the publisher and the bookshop."

"I see."

"Once the distributor receives the orders from the bookshop, it'll request for volumes from the publisher. The publisher will then provide some from its warehouse, and the distributors deliver them to the bookstore."

"I see...so publishers have some level of stock, right? I guess so. It's impossible to print so many books at one go."

"Right. When the orders increase, and the warehouse stock drops, the publisher will then say, 'right, let's print'."

"Righto."

"Of course, the one who decides whether to reprint or not isn't the author, and it's probably not the editorial branch. I'm guessing that it's probably the sales branch."

"I see, I see."

"As for reprint volumes--it'll typically be between 2,000 to 3,000 volumes. That's my personal experience, and from what I hear from the other authors, it's the same."

"2,000 to 3,000. In that case, the amount of publication fee you get--you be from 118,000 to 177,000 Yen."

Mental sums again. This was when I really understood that my brain was wired differently from Nitadori's.

I feel that even if I'm to praise her now, we won't come to a common agreement, so I continue,

"I'm really grateful to be able to get that much money without being able to do anything."

"Yeah. Your commission increase after you finished a job."

I nodded. After earning that money, I really felt that 'reaping without sowing' really fit this situation.

"If the popularity increases, the sales volume will grow, and if the supply isn't enough, they'll print thousands of volumes, no tens of thousands. Erm, well, I..."

"Wow!"

"Well, I guess I shouldn't be 'talking about the future'--"

I used both hands to gesture moving my belongings from my thighs to the outside of the window,

"We'll leave this aside for now..bye bye..."

And Nitadori waved outside, saying that.

The first reprint of my first volume of 'Vice Versa' was 3,000 copies.

It was a certain day in August, during what is commonly known as the obon

Mom was working as a nurse, and never had any breaks during obon and the end of year. I was alone at home, writing all day long during the school holidays.

And it was then that the editor-in-charge called me.

"There's a second print ! Congrats!"

The first reprint would be specially denoted as 'second print'.

As for whether it was considered fast or slow, I didn't know

"Thank you very much!"

All I could be confident of was that I was really happy (later, the editor-in-charge told me that there are works who had quicker second prints, mine was rather fast).

And while I was indulging in my delight and intending to hang up,

"So if there are 'any parts that require typographical corrections', please contact me by tomorrow, latest."

The editor-in-charge said.

And so I asked,

"Erm? What is that?"

Typographical errors--

"It's a little off from the earnings, but looking at how this is going, I think this is the most suitable moment to do this...can I explain?"

"Of course. Please do."

Typographical errors typically refers to the errors when 'transplanting words'.

In other words, if there are any errors the block aligning workers in charge of typography (the people in charge of aligning blocks, arranging the words), checking on the miscues will be to correct them.

Of course, people nowadays don't use moveable type of printing. Thus, in current situation, mistransplants would refer to the typical 'wrong words'. That is what I mean.

Last week, I mentioned that as an author, I had to check through what I write, and hand them over for the editors and proofreaders to check, and I had to check them again--

But even so, there would still be mistakes.

Basically, this was my own mistake (and nobody else realized it).

There are rare occurrences of the editors making mistakes (and nobody else realizing it). The typos on the content page and the story synopsis would be categorized under this.

"The typos that managed to evade a few eyes and show themselves to the public--will be corrected during the second print, the first reprint. Thus, the editor-in-charge told me that when the second print is decided, he'll ask me to hurry and send over the corrected parts. This is because the publisher wants to hurry with the rerelease and avoid a stockout of goods, missing out on the selling opportunity."

"I see...now I know that book correcting is such a case."

Nitadori looked impressed as she nodded away. I too only knew of such a thing back then.

"After that, what about you, sensei?"

"I was really happy about publishing my first work, and I reread the first volume so that I could write the next volume, but I didn't find any typo errors. So, when I checked each word and sentence---"

"There was none?"

"I found 5 cases of them..."

During the first print of the first volume of 'Vice Versa', I found 5 instances of errors.

There was one case when I missed out a period.

There was once when the furigana of the word 'hem', suso, was written as 'sode' instead.

Ema, who typically addressed herself as 'watashi' in hiragana, addressed herself as 'watashi' in kanji in a certain area.

What was supposed to be typed as 'conquer the world', (seifuku), ended up as 'school uniform the world' (seifuku)

And there was once when Shin and Sin's denotation was completely reversed.

"About that last mistake...I thought to myself 'I can't make such a mistake no matter what'...so when I found out about the error, I was really devastated."

The names of Shin and Sin were so similar, it was common to have mistakes in changing text. Speaking of which, it's really troublesome to have to change the text.

Ever since I discovered that mistake, I started activating the function to 'record Japanese characters in the dictionary'. If I type the hiragana 'shi' (し), it'll come out as 'Sin' (シン). In other words,

しんはいつた。

Change→ Shin said.

しはいつた。

Change→ Sin said.

しんはしのむなぐらをつかんだが、しは、だまつてしんをにらみかえすだけだつた。

Change→ Shin grabbed Sin by the collar, but Sin merely looked back at Shin silently.

This isn't an error unique to 'Vice Versa'. It was said that the initial print for all volumes will have some form of typo. The reason why people would buy the initial print of the topselling works probably has something to do with this little trivia.

But even so, I want to write a story with no mistakes as much as I can, so the initial print volumes always scare me.

In the 8 volumes that came out later, I did my best to check--but once the official volumes came out, I do find some errors.

"But I've never had the legendary level of typos."

"'Legendary level'? Is there such a thing?"

Nitadori asked in surprise.

"Yeah. There are quite a lot of infamous typo mistakes in history."

I honestly answered.

"Wh-what kind?"

I do think that we'll be off topic again--

But I really like the topic of typos, so I'll talk about it. There's still some time until the terminal.

The history of publishing can also be called the history of typos, no doubt about that. I'm still too weak, and right now, I'm working hard to etch out this history.

Amongst them, the one most catchy and deemed to be the world's first typo error is the Bible called the 'Adulterous Bible'.

In this Bible, the one line in Moses' Ten Commandments, 'thou shall not commit adultery, and because of a typo, missed out on the word 'not' that would have a negative connotation.

In other words, the meaning became 'thou shall commit adultery'.

I guess the chances of a typo more ridiculous than this in human history--

I suppose that should be zero.

"..."

Nitadori heard my words, and widened her eyes, her mouth slightly ajar. In other words, she was completely taken aback.

She was looking skeptical as to how could there possibly be such a thing happening in this world, but the fact was that it happened, and I couldn't do anything about it.

There also appeared a legendary level of typo in Japanese history.

It was due to several errors, but that bug's name has probably been changed forever.

Of course, the name of that bug is called cockroach (Gokiburi).

It was said that its actual name was 'Gokikaburi', but in the first biology encyclopaedia released in the 17th year of the Meiji Era, the name was transcribed as 'Gokiburi' instead.

The book only had a first edition, and no corrections could be made. The later books used this encyclopaedia as a reference, and the name 'gokiburi' became widespread, before it was set stone.

"Hey...I don't think it's really possible, but...you aren't just making up a story now, are you? Is this an episode of your creation?"

Nitadori showed a skeptical look from beneath her glasses.

"I'm not making this up."

I waved my hand as I answered.

"Well, let's leave this topic on typos aside for now--"

I used both hands to gesture moving my belongings from my thighs to the outside of the window, throwing out the topic of typos.

"Now that it ends--where have I stopped exactly?"

So many off-topic stuff caused me to wonder where did I stop in my main point.

"About the first volume of 'Vice Versa' having 27,000 copies for the initial print, and another 3,000 immediately afterwards...this part."

Nitadori corrected me.

'Vice Versa' really sold well.

By the time the second volume was published in October, the first volume had 3 reprints, and the total sales was more than 40,000.

The initial print volume for the second volume is 27,000 just like before. I heard it's rather amazing that the figures aren't any lesser than the previous volume. Of course, the second volume had a reprint in the month it was sold. The first volume was still reprinting back then.

By the time November came, the total number of distributed volumes, including the first and second volumes, was about 80,000 volumes.

And so, at the end of the year, the amount of money I had in my bank account--

Was about 4 million Yen.

"4 million Yen...amazing..."

Nitadori widened her eyes as she said that. I was about as surprised as she was, probably more.

"I never dreamt that my work would sell that well the year I debuted, that I would earn so much money..."

This was in no way a humble brag, but my own honest thoughts.

I'm ashamed of it, but when the first volume was released, I once predicted the sales figures, thinking it would happen.

Assuming that the earnings for the first volume was 1,500,000 Yen, and the initial print of the second volume will be reduced, so I'll calculate it with 1,000,000 Yen. I could earn about 2.5 million yen that year, and to me, that was a lot of money.

"But you're too naive, aren't you?"

Nitadori gave a mischievous snicker. I know that it's an act, but I was still taken aback.

"I-I guess..."

If I actually had a huge sum of 4 million Yen in hand, I'll feel really terrified. Luckily, the money is transacted into the bank account. If a large stack of cash is shown suddenly appears in front of me, I think I might lose it..

"Of course I'm scared, really scared...to be able to use such a large sum of money. I was happy, but that happiness always comes with fear. I get the money, but I do tell myself not to spend it wildly."

"In fact, you never used that money, right? After the tax deducted, you practically saved them all."

"To be honest, I don't need to spend a lot."

"Hey, if you can, do tell me, sensei, what did your mom think of you earning that much. Well...did she say anything?"

Well, I'm able to answer that, so I reply,

"Mom only told me two things."

"What are they?"

"First, 'use the money for yourself'. In other words, I don't need to worry about the house rent, food, and family expenditure. I intended to pay though..."

"So you were rejected by your mother? I think I can understand that. That's a parent's responsibility."

"Hm, maybe..."

About this, the situation might change a little in the future--but I guess it isn't bad to talk about this now.

"And the other?"

"Hm--'don't spend like crazy!'"

"Ahaha, anyone would be told that."

"Yep. Thus, I thought of a few spending rules, printed them out, and stuck it in front of my desk."

"Really? What are they?"

They're simple.

'I can buy the basic stuff for work (stationery, materials)'

'Before buying, I have to consider. Don't buy impulsively. Check the price before buying'.

'With savings, I won't have to worry about the future!'

'Don't carry large sums of cash around!'

'Don't tell anyone else that I'm rich!'

That's basically it.

"I see. Disciplining yourself. That's impressive."

"Even so, I bought a lot of stuff."

I showed off the watch on my left wrist to Nitadori.

"This is the thing I bought with my first paycheck, my memories about 'Vice Versa'. In October, on the year I debuted, I made up the mind to buy it when I returned home from the editorial branch, and I spent 30,000 Yen."

I guess a 30,000 Yen watch might be considered cheap.

But I was wearing a watch I got from my Middle School days, and that's worth 3,000 Yen. The price shot up to 10 times here. On a side note, the scrap on that old watch was about to break, and I was scared of losing it, so I had it as a pocket watch that is hanging in the bathroom.

"No matter how expensive of a watch I'll get in the future, I don't intend to throw this one. Even if it's broken and I can't repair it, I'll put it up in the room."

"Like Meek's muffler..."

Nitadori noted happily. Yep, that's right, I do find it similar.

Shin really treasured the muffler Meek gave him in the first volume, and would always wear it on his neck when the weather was cold.

"Also, I bought that little notebook computer I mentioned before."

I pointed at the rack above me.

My backpack contained the most practical work tool. In fact, the backpack used to hold the stuff was bought using the publication fee too.

"Also, there's also this, though mom was the one who provided the money first."

I took out the smartphone I just used for calculating from my pocket.

"The editor-in-charge told me 'I can't really force you, but you really helped me out by having a smartphone. I can't force you, but you really helped me out'."

"You said it twice!"

"Well, since I had to spend the night in a hotel in Tokyo, it was better for me to have a cellphone...when I was in my first year of High School, I had to head to Tokyo because of many meetings, and I felt a phone was a must, so I got it. The first phone I had was the latest smartphone. I hesitated due to how expensive it was, but with it, I could see maps, check information, and use the tethering function so that my laptop can be connected to the internet anywhere. It's really convenient!"

I excitedly chatted about the cellphone I finally got in my first year of high school.

"Well, but I never actually thought of getting a cellphone before then."

That was a fact.

It seemed mom wanted to buy one for me when I entered high school. To be honest, I didn't really have such a want, and that's because--

"Basically, I didn't think a cellphone is a must. I don't have any friends I can call, and with an internet function, I don't need to have a call function!"

I heartily finished off my words.

"Ahaha..."

In any case, Nitadori laughed.

"Then, are you using it properly as a phone?"

I glance at the smartphone in my hand, answering,

"I am. The numbers in the phone book are increasing."

"Who are they?"

"Other than my mom, everyone related to work."

"You're a high school student!"

Nitadori said happily.

I too do think that this isn't normal, but I don't mind. I do think that adding so many numbers in the phone book is something wonderful.

"Then am I considered 'work related'?"

Nitadori asked, and I nodded, answering,

"Of course."

In any case, she is Meek's voice actress.

Unlike a novel, an anime needs the collective work of many to be completed. They're people involved with the important work, and in a certain sense, 'partners'.

"Then--"

Nitadori spoke up.

"That's why--"

But it was wiped out by my words.

"Ah, please continue."

Nitadori allowed me to go first, so I was feeling embarrassed as I continued.

But even so, it's too difficult for me to talk while looking at Nitadori's face all the time. Thus, I look at the backrest of the front seat, saying my true thoughts.

"I really want to thank all the people involved in the production of the anime, and the voice actors."

"..."

"As long as I can help, I'll do so."

"..."

"If everyone involved in the anime can feel blessed, I'll be really happy."

Having said what I wanted to say, I glanced to the right.

"..."

What was that?

Nitadori looked a little forlorn.

I didn't know the reason at all, but I knew this topic was inappropriate.

I slipped the smartphone into my pocket.

"Now then, where did I end at...?"

From the topic that was way off point, I proceeded to drag us back to the main point.

"Right! Since we talked about earnings, we'll have to talk about 'tax reporting.'"

The moment I said this, Nitadori raised her right index finger, practically saying I know'!

"I think I heard of it! Like a blue form, red form or something."

"Right--but there's no red form actually. There's only a blue form and a white form."

"Is ? Is that so? I thought there'll be a red form when the figures are in a deficit?"

Nitadori said with a serious look.

I didn't know if she was really mistaken, or just joking around.

In other words, I didn't know whether it was an ominous omen, or an act--

I guess I shouldn't mention this to Nitadori.

I continued to explain.

"I earned 4 million Yen in my first year as an author, and I had to file my tax in the following year, from February to March."

"I did hear of the term tax filing, but basically, what do I do? Speaking of which, what does it mean?"

"Basically, it means 'determining how much money you earned, and reporting it to the country'."

"I see, so tax filing...but for what purpose?"

"There are two answers to this. Why does the country need people to file their tax, and why I have to file my taxes."

"Then...the country part first."

"That's because the country needs to collect taxes. If the people don't report honestly, the country won't know how much to deduct, how much tax to collect."

"I see...then, what about you, sensei?"

"To get some tax rebates."

"Hm?"

I didn't explain it before. As the term implied, the income tax had something to do with the word 'income'.

The income would refer to the earned money ('sales money') deducted by the necessary fees ('expenses').

"I did mention that the publisher would deduct the income tax before sending it to me, right?"

"Yep."

"That's directly deducted from the sales amount, and has nothing to do with the expenses."

"Ah, I see..."

"Thus, I'll report to the country saying that 'I spent this much, so this is my actual income, and I had too much income tax deducted', and ask the country to return me some of the income tax I paid. Well, this is the reason for me to report tax."

"I see...then, what do your expenses contain?"

"First off, the necessities needed for writing. Back then, it'll be pens and composition paper, but right now, it's computer and printer and so on."

"And the rest?"

"I think the more well known ones are probably information, book fees. Movies are considered information too, so I have to include DVD fees. I want something actual when referencing a work, that thing will become information too. Also...there's the fees for phone and internet, the transportation fees to head to and back from the editorial branch, and if there are travel fees for material gathering--"

I raised each point I thought of, and Nitadori continued to nod in response.

"House rent and utilities are to be considered, but they're used for daily living, I can't get a full rebate. I need to explain how much was used for work, and report that part. And so I did."

There are many other examples, but I decided to state to this point.

"When filing my taxes, I'll fill in anything I think of as expenses in the form, and submit it."

Nitadori showed a serious look as she heard my explanation. I once read in a book that 'if a student is very outstanding, the teacher will be very motivated to teach'. Right now, I'm really feeling it.

This outstanding student asked,

"But sensei, when calculating and explaining how much tax to pay, you have to prepare some 'receipts', right?"

"Right. Thus, when I buy something, I'll ask for a receipt no matter what, and keep it."

'Anyone working in the book industry has to keep receipts!'--having learned of this in a essay from the past, from the day I first submitted my draft I would keep receipts whenever I bought anything. I would first keep my receipts in my wallet, and once I got home, throw them all into a large transparent box.

But when doing that, once I started to actually account, I had to sort out a large number of receipts.

In other words, I had to sort them out by material information, transport fees, and so on. This work is really tedious.

Thus, nowadays, I'll use a multi-layered document case. I'll write out the accounting item on every drawer, and after drawing out my receipts from my wallet, I could sort them out into the respective drawers.

I did check on the internet on ways to file taxes,

And I learned that there was two of them.

One of them was the very simple process 'white form'.

The other was the 'blue form'. The process was a little more complicated, but there would be more privileges to be enjoyed, tax rebates to be obtained.

I heard that when the sum was not too big, simply taking the white form would be good enough, so I did so.

The information to be prepared would be the accounting items, and separately calculate the receipts in a statement. In other words,

"This is how much money I used."

A form to explain this. I used a calculating software on the computer to come up with this. It sounds simple, but sorting out the receipts and entering the numbers take quite a lot of time.

I took this information, compiled the receipts, the pay slips provided by ASCII Media Works (at this moment, I'll receive a statement for the entire year), and a stamp, and head to the tax department.

"Is it hard to do?"

"In fact, it wasn't that hard. I just needed to follow the instructions of the uncle, fill in the particulars, and it was done quickly."

"And then...what happens next?"

"They thought that 'I paid too much income tax', and gave me my money in the form of 'tax rebate'. A few days later, that sum of money, not small in itself, would be transacted to my account."

"I see."

"I can put it so lightly right now. But in fact, I had to search everything out by myself, so I really went through a lot of trouble...to be honest, this is the most troublesome thing to me after I became an author."

"But if that's last February, you reported your tax this year, didn't you? Your earnings this year."

I nodded.

"I won't ask about the income...but it's probably increasing, isn't it?"

That's right.

The income I had last year--was shocking over 18 million Yen.

The reprint of the 1st and 2nd volumes, combined with the initial prints and reprints of the 3rd to 7th volume, brings the total to 300,000 Yen.

I started to wonder the meaning of the words Nitadori said 'I won't ask about the money'.

Would that refer to 'it's rude to continue asking, so I won't ask, and you don't have to answer'? Or 'I won't ask, so please tell me'?

I gulped the tea, pondering.

I could tell her, but I didn't hope that she thinks I'm bragging.

But even so, I've already mentioned my earnings for the first year, and she probably can imagine that the next earning will be far more than the first year.

What do I do? What do I do?

Just when I was feeling frustrated,

"Well, for example, if the earnings are about 18 million Yen...."

I could hear Nitadori's voice.

"Eh?"

"So how much will the tax be? The tax rates will increase greatly, right?"

"...How do you know?"

"Eh? How what?"

"Eh? Yearly earnings..."

"Ah, ahh, I got it correct!?"

Nitadori looked delighted yet embarrassed.

"Right on point. I'm wondering how did you get the figure...."

"Well...the anime announcement was made this January, right?"

I nodded.

"Back then, there was a lot of news on the media saying 'a popular work that has sold more than 450,000 books', right?"

I nodded.

"The first year has 80,000 copies, and at that moment, it was 450,000 copies, so deducting that will give me 370,000 copies. In the world of advertisements however, such a number--"

"Right, they'll make a 'rough estimate' (Kiryoku)."

"Kiryoku'?"

"Yeah, it means that they'll use a slightly big number during release to get people to easily understand--"

"Yeah, that's it! So I used 350,000 copies to count, and got 18,000,000 Yen."

"I see..."

This little deduction really surprised me, but it removed any of my troubles. She really helped me out.

"Right. I earned that much money, and I had to handle a second tax."

That happened just 3 months ago.

It was the second time I had to do my taxes, but I don't want to spend an entire day doing so. If I have that sort of time, I want to use it to write a novel.

I was about to start school again, and my time to spend entire days writing was about to come to an end.

So I left it to a pro.

"A pro?"

"Accountant."

"Ahh."

"Actually, there are two differences between the first time last year and the second time this year."

"One of them is that you hired an accountant. What is the other?"

"Well, I switched to a blue form."

"It's here! The blue form!"

Nitadori squealed excitedly, and then tilted her head, saying,

"--erm, what does that mean? What is the difference from the white form?"

"Well, when using the blue form to report, you need documents that are more detailed. Thus, it's hard to hide the money flow, and of course, harder to evade tax."

But even so, everyone will choose the white form if I say this, so there are many privileges earned when reporting with a blue form.

That would be the unique privilege of 'tax reduction'. This reduction would be 'cutting off'. The blue form reporting had privilege function to deduct the sum of money to be taxed, and of course, the tax will be lesser.

Also, another important thing is that if anyone wished to report using the blue form, there is a need to request 'I'm using a blue form' a year prior. I did so when I was reporting using the white form.

Having talked for so long, I felt thirsty, and Nitadori too was the same, so we drank our bottles of tea.

Both of us lifted our bottles in unison, let the tea flow in, and put down the bottles in unison, it looked as though we were doing ballet.

Because of this, Nitadori was smiling at me--

I was stunned. I did not know what sort of face to show.

I should not be simply answering questions, even if it is a lie or an act, I should at least say something empathetic.

My face sullen, and Nitadori beamed, asking me,

"Is it nice?"

I honestly answered,

"Really nice."

"Great."

Having decided on blue form report, and to ask an accountant to handle it--

"Now then, I'll explain what I had to do in detail."

"Yep."

"I submitted a lot of documents. That's all. I submitted all my paypals, a photocopy of my passbook, and as proof that I paid, I had to prepare a whole list of receipts for all categories."

"So, will the accountant be in charge of counting the receipts, filing the documents, and everything?"

"Right. It's really easy...of course, I'll pay appropriate. It'll be more expensive to just throw everything to him and let him handle. If I'm to sort out the accounting items and calculate before sending the data over, the fees will be cheaper."

"I see."

"However, the fees here can be counted as 'expense'. Comparing the money I pay to get the accountant to handle this, and the time I spend...I guess looking at the results, I think it'll be cheaper to leave it to him. Of course, that goes different for those 'I have time, I know what to do, so I'll handle this myself!'."

Authors earn through the publication fees.

The publication fees will first be taxed before it enters the account.

And through reporting tax, tax rebates on excessive tax is earned.

This is where my explanation ends.

"I said a few times before that the me back then wasn't very familiar with this. I was practically wandering around in the darkness, dealing with everything."

"But the editorial branch tell you anything about this?"

Nitadori said it as a matter of fact--

"Nope, they didn't."

I shook my head.

"Really?"

"The editorial branch has no duty to explain that much to me...speaking of which, they probably don't know that much either."

"Then?"

"Authors can only increase their own knowledge. The only ones capable of helping me out at this point...are the senior authors."

Looking my situation, I practically had no assistance before I submitted the white form. That was because I did not know any other authors. Even the request for a blue form was something I found out for myself.

However, it was a certain senior author who told me 'just hire an accountant'.

I had the same meeting times as him, so we do meet at the editorial branch from time to time. I practically read through all his works, and I was really honored to meet him.

After that, the editor-in-charge brought me out to eat.

Whenever the editor-in-charge had time and arranged for other authors to meet, he'll invite parties to gather in a mea organized by the editorial branch, a party.

The location was at 'Kagurazaka' near the editorial branch. I think I heard of this place before. This place had some of the old houses from before, and also a lot of posh restaurants.

I'm really happy that the editorial branch is willing to allow us to enjoy such delicious food in such a posh restaurant. Of course, I don't drink.

While we gather, I talked in depth about my things with that senior author.

That author knew that my work was selling well, and he told me in depth about the blue form reporting. He also introduced me to an accountant him and his author friends really trusted, and really helped me.

Now, having finished everything about tax filing--

There was almost 15 minutes till the terminal.

Nitadori asked me the time, and I answered as I showed my watch.

"Now then, the remaining time is short, so I'll ask anything else next week. Thanks for this week too. It's really interesting."

"No problems."

I recalled that she did say something like that the previous week.

Back then, I talked about reading the fan letters to pass time back then. Will she ask about it this one? I think answering questions would be easier for me.

While I thought of that, Nitadori said,

"Sensei...I got a question."

"Go ahead."

Thinking that it was easier for me, I answered,

"Erm...what do you think of my performance last week?"

She asked something I could not answer easily.

She asked me that seriously, staring at me intently.

Obviously, I looked flustered.

"Ah...it's fine, you don't have to force yourself..."

Nitadori said dejectedly.

"Erm, if I have to say my personal thoughts--"

Hearing my words, Nitadori turned her glasses towards me.

In such situations, I won't lie. I'll just say my actual thoughts honestly.

"Wh-what is it?"

"The participating voice actors really performed marvellously before my eyes. Shin, Sin, Ema, Pluto, Meek and the others, it felt like they came to life."

I did my best to answer.

"...Tha-thank--thank you very much!"

Nitadori thanked me. Again, I honestly stated my points.

"But...actually, I did say that once the After Record ended."

"Erm, but, well...the others are there, so I thought that it was that occasion..."

Nitadori said, looking somewhat bashful.

"I'm not that good at faking it."

Personally, I can't act. The moment I finished, I realized something I was curious with, and took the initiative to ask Nitadori,

"Oh yeah, can I ask you a question..."

"Go ahead, go ahead!"

She beamed happily in agreement, and so, I raised my doubt.

"Nitadori--when did you start acting?"

"..."

Seeing her look so flabbergasted, I was wondering if I asked something I should not have.

After thinking about it 3 times, I did not think there was anything strange about it.

Soon after, I thought that she did not know what I was referring to,

"Erm...after you read 'Momotarou', when you heard the questions from everyone in class, I think I overheard a conversation--that you were participating in a drama club in your previous school..."

"Ah! Ahh! Erm! Right! That's it, you mean?"

I didn't know--what was Nitadori mistaken about, but it appeared to be settled. The blank look she showed started to move.

"Right! I was in a drama club. I thought what you meant when you mentioned 'acting'."

I see, so that's how it is. I asked the wrong question. Should have asked 'when did she start acting'.

"Sorry...I might have phrased it wrongly. Also, I overheard your conversation, it seems. Sorry."

"It's fine! I understand! About that drama club, isn't it? Well, please don't think that you're eavesdropping. You're seated in front of me, and it's weird if you can't hear. I was answering to everyone else after all."

Nitadori spoke with her usual tone, and then answered my initial question,

"I did learn a little when I was in elementary school, and I began studying it for real in middle school, for 3 straight years, until I transferred to this high school."

In that case, she studied this for at least 4 years. No wonder the acting's really good. Of course, I don't think that alone would make her a good voice actress however; I'm guessing that she had all kinds of other training too.

"I've been studying in an international school all this while."

Nitadori informed me of this, and I thoroughly understood why she was so proficient in English.

"The drama teacher back then--"

She continued to chirp happily,

"Would say to us happily before teaching us, 'Everyone, transform yourself into someone else! You can be anyone!'"

"Was that in English?"

"Of course."

I started to have a mental image of a foreigner teacher called Mister John or a Miss Jeanne happily chatting in front of everyone. I don't know English, so when the teacher's speaking in English, there was subtitles.

Nitadori in 7th grade was among the students, and her appearance is the same as she is now, other than her being a little shorter. She has long black hair, and spectacles on.

"She's a nice teacher...she said 'alright, time for acting'--"

So it's Miss Jeanne.

"To me, that's like a transformation spell..."

I felt that something was amiss.

And then, I immediately realized the reason.

When speaking to me, Nitadori would look at me in the eyes.

This probably was because she was the one raising the questions, that she would abide by the etiquette when talking with people, and look at me in the eyes.

I would be flustered by it, unable to stare at a cute girl throughout as I continue talking with her.

Thus, I avoided it many times. I kept feeling Nitadori's eyes as I either looked at the backrest of the seat in front of me, or at my knees.

But this Nitadori was different.

Nitadori did not look at me.

Feeling amiss, I stared at Nitadori, but she wasn't looking at me.

Her eyes were looking at her intertwined fingertips.

"It was the same during the After Record. I would mutter this quietly in my heart."

I recalled her trembling lips that shivered with the script.

"Ah! That was!"

I could not help but blurt out."

"Eh?"

Nitadori finally looked at me, her eyes looking over her shoulder.

"That moment...as in?"

She looked at me skeptically. Imprisoned by this stare, I answered.

"It was during the After Record last week...when you were to appear on the B scene, I saw you muttering something, Nitadori."

"Wah! It's embarrassing...I'm found out!"

There was no pretense in her words, but her face really went red, and she cupped her head.

"I always did such a thing before recording...wahh, it's really embarrassing..."

I see. So she did so every time, and nobody realized it?

"Hii..."

She continued to groan. This might be the first time I found Nitadori to be a year younger than me.

Seeing her look so cute, I asked

"That was in English, right? What were you muttering about?"

Nitadori suddenly lifted her head at me,

"It's time to play!"

She answered with fluency. Her enunciation and accent was just like a foreigner.

"It's, time--to, play..."

I quietly repeated in Japanese enunciation.

I was not proficient in English, but I would pay attention to class.

So, I think I can understand that level of English, anyway.

Of course, the 'play' here isn't about 'playing games', but 'play acting'.

"I cut off the 'it's', so the little spell I mutter is--'time to play'.

"Time to play..."

"Alright, it's time to act! Come on, everyone, break away from yourself and be someone else. I'm going to become someone else now. Time to play, time to play."



"I see, so you can transform into anyone else when acting?"

"Yep. You can become anyone. Anyone can do it, and so can you, sensei. Want to try?"

"Me? Erm..."

Time to play.

I muttered these words in my head.

I guess it's impossible for me, I immediately thought.

I'm an author, I write novels.

I can think of fake worlds, write fake conversations.

But I can't act. I can't handle fake conversation.

Right when I was wondering how to explain this to Nitadori--

The train began to broadcast an announcement indicating the impending arrival at the terminal.

So in the end, I missed out on the chance to tell her.

Chapter 6 - May 15, I was strangled by Her

I'm a High School Boy and a Bestselling Light Novel author, strangled by my female classmate who is my junior and a voice actress.

This is my current predicament.

I don't feel pain or unbearable, but I'm about to die.

"Save!"

The one yelling that was not me, but Nitadori, strangling me by the neck. This line is terse, yet it sounded so slow and long to me.

However, I can't comprehend what she meant at all.

It was probably 5 seconds since the moment when she choked me. And then, in another 2 seconds, I probably won't be able to think of anything else.

I think the ghost lights are just a self-defense system in the brain now? It probably can help me look for clues in my past experiences to save me, I guess.

I can clearly remember what Nitadori said, but I had no idea.

Anyway, why did Nitadori want to kill me?

I did not know.

I didn't know the reason.

Thursday, May 15th.

Time flew by fast, and it has been more than a month since the After Records and the new Semester started.

I was riding that usual Limited Express train, seated at my old seat, the left side seat on the last row in the free seating carriage.

The sky at home is really bright, but the weather report stated that it would be raining in Tokyo, so I had a foldable umbrella in the side pocket of my backpack.

The train departed on time.

After sitting on the same train ride for more than a month, I realized very well that the day got longer. When I stood on the platform on this day, I felt that the sun was rather high up.

There were 13 After Records in all, so tomorrow, it will be the 7th, halfway through.

During the first session, I probably did see Nitadori in the recording room, but I couldn't remember.

During the second session, I met Nitadori on this train for the first time.

From the third to sixth session, we went to Tokyo together for 4 consecutive trips, and I answered a lot of questions.

They included everything, from the delusions I had since young, till the intention I had to write novels.

The struggles before submitting the work to Dengeki Bunko.

The method of writing novels.

Publishing fees and taxes.

So, what will she be asking about today?

I guess I can say everything I can talk about now, right

Thinking about this, I continued to space out, and then, I saw swaying black hair.

"Hello, sensei, doing well?"

"I'm fine, thanks. What about you?"

"I'm fine too, thanks."

First, we started off with a conversation even an elementary school kid can translate into English.

"For you, enjoy."

Nitadori, who handed me the shopping bag, is not wearing a skirt, but jeans this time, with a green military jacket and a blue sweater.

Nitadori placed the bag behind her, and placed her jacket on it. Then, she ties her usual long hair carefully behind her, letting the hair drape down her right shoulder to her chest before sitting down.

I accept the convenience store bag.

"I'm tucking in. Thanks."

With a rippling sound, I take out the sea salt flavored potato chips and the bottle of tea.

"Thinking about it, I'm seeing your back every day at school, so I know you're pretty lively. I'll probably be seeing the blackboard a little better if you're lethargic."

"I guess."

Nitadori's always sitting behind me every day during class. No matter whether it's the classroom, or anywhere in school, we'll definitely not talk to each other.

There are times when I pass by Nitadori on the corridor, but even after finding her, I won't talk to her.

Thinking about it, I do find this kind of relationship very strange. While I'm thinking about that, Nitadori said the same thing as she sat beside me.

"It's strange...we're seated in front and behind each other, so close together. During the After Record, there's a thick soundproof glass between us, and right now, we're côte à côte..."

She seemed to be rather incredulous too.

And it's a mystery as to why she wouldn't use the common term 'side by side' instead.

The train continues to move forward.

While I'm still chomping on the potato chips, the train conductor arrived early to check the tickets.

The conductor today is the woman I met several times before. She probably has an impression on us taking these sets every Thursday.

After checking the tickets, Miss Conductor proceeded to leave.

"You two are always together--what kind of relationship do you have?"

Miss Conductor never asked such questions. I wonder what should I do if she was to ask, but a conductor wouldn't ask anything regarding a passenger's privacy."

"Now then..."

And then, as before, Nitadori's questioning time was about to begin--

Or so I thought, but I was still hungry, so Nitadori started talking about some harmless weather issues.

According to the weather report, she said, Tokyo's weather was bad, and that when heading to the recording studio the next day, I should be careful not to fall down.

"Erm...can't I skip it?"

I asked as I rolled up the bag of potato chips.

"We're not going to school!"

Nitadori chuckled heartily.

Of course, both of us were merely joking. After Records was not fun and games. We were not having lessons at school, but doing work. We cannot skip work without unless it is a valid reason (some will ask if skipping classes is okay).

In the past, whenever a voice actor isn't around due to illness, the others would act it out and assume he was around. I do find such a scene really intriguing, I do find that it's not conducive.

And during the next week, the voice actor on leave would act alone with a pre-recording.

I do find it tough, and at the same time, I'm moved by their outstanding acting.

"Now then, I'll be using this notebook today."

Nitadori's holding the notebook that appeared last week.

I remember what I last talked about last week being about income and taxes. Nitadori didn't open her notebook at all during then.

"You got a lot of questions to ask, I guess?"

I asked.

"Yep. About a certain theme, or I'll say, all kinds of questions. If you want to explain more however, sensei, please go ahead. Also, please forgive me if a question offends you in any way. If it's a question you can't answer due to your work, please tell me straight away 'you shouldn't be asking this question'."

"Got it."

"Now then--"

This time, Nitadori actually opened the notebook.

However, she cautiously made sure not to let me see the words on it, pointing her finger on the pages.

"Erm..."

Does she really need to worry about having so many questions?

I was starting to worry what would have happened if I was to reject the first question? Would it ruin Nitadori's mood? Or would it cause the opposite effect and guilt trip her such that she will shrink back?

What exactly is the problem Nitadori is referring to--

"Erm, this--when publishing a book, you'll sign a contract with the publisher, right? If you have to do so, how will you do it?"

"Phew."

"Why are you relieved?"

"No, well, I'm wondering what should I do if I can't answer the question."

"Ahaha. I guess this question is fine, right?"

"No problems."

"The answer is?"

"Yes."

For my situation--I'll sign a 'publishing contract'.

There is a kind of publishing where 4 pieces of A4 size printed paper are stapled on the left side. Of course, this is the style Dengeki Bunko goes with. I don't know what style does the other companies or editorial branches go by.

I showed her a copy of the contract, saying,

"There are all kinds of clauses on it...I did spend all my effort to read them, barely, though I can no longer remember the specifics.--"

I did say during the previous week that 'the first 50 copies printed would be used for promotion, so it is not counted as publishing fee'. This clause itself is clearly written in the contract.

Interestingly, the contract also stated 'when the author buys a book, he gets to enjoy a 20% discount privilege'. Whenever a work was published, I would receive 10 copies, and for every reprint, I would receive another, so I did not use this clause to buy a book.

"Also, you need to fill in your address and name on the actual contract. In this situation, you need to write your actual name, put a stamp on it, and the contract is complete. Of course, the company's name and stamp are on it before then."

The contract included my work of the same series title, so I only did sign one contract.

Before 'Vice Versa' was published, I stamped at the editorial branch. There were 2 copies of the contract, and one of them is left for me to keep.

"I see...the publisher is very thorough in what they do."

Nitadori said, sounding impressed. Thus, I feel that I have to say something.

"Yeah. Also--nobody did sign a contract."

"What?"

"I did sign a contract before I published my work, but--"

It was something a senior of mine told me at the end of year party.

We were chatting on this back then, and once I said that I signed a contract before I published my book, that person simply told me.

"Ah, I did sign a contract for my debut work at this time too."

"Eh?"

The reason why I was shocked was that this person had been writing under the Dengeki Bunko brand for a few years.

He had been publishing books for more than 10 years, and that work had been adapted into an anime.

"Eh? In that case, erm...what did that author do over the past 10 years?"

Nitadori asked a sensible question.

"I asked a similar question."

"And then."

"He answered, 'oh, it's always been a verbal agreement'."

"..."

It's no wonder that Nitadori's stunned.

To be honest, I was stunned too, so shocked myself.

It's fine that there's no problems if the money was sent to me, but I really was shocked by such a strange thing done by the publisher since I assumed I had to sign a contract.

There's more to this.

After hearing our conversation, another senior near me agreed, saying,

"Ah, now that you mentioned it, I just signed it recently. I didn't know anything about a publishing contract before this."

And then, another senior author refuted,

"No, wait. I signed it before I debuted though?"

"Me too..."

In other words, there are those who 'signed before they debuted', and 'those that didn't get to sign'. Right when I was wondering why that was the case...I knew my answer.

Those that won prizes with Dengeki Bunko would have signed contracts.

Those that debuted without signing contracts were the ones who did not win prizes, and were nominated instead.

But anyway, since I did sign, I suppose everyone else would have signed as well.

"That's how it goes, I think."

I answered the first question, but I don't know if that is good enough for her reference.

"Now then, the next question is--"

Nitadori opened her notebook.

"What does an author 'confidentiality' include? Voice actors can't reveal things like the work, script and so on, so I guess authors are the same in this sense?"

"Hm."

Luckily, it's another question I can answer.

Perhaps Nitadori chose the easiest questions for me to answer.

Confidentiality--

Strictly put, it seems to refer to 'legal obligation', so I didn't know if there's such a law in the world of authorship.

I'll treat this term as 'until the work is officially published, nobody can reveal what they knower in work to those not involved'.

"The easiest way to understand this is the release date. For example, even when Dengeki Bunko decides on a publication date, nobody can talk about it until the official release. Dengeki Bunko's mail magazine will be the earliest to release the news, about 2 months before the official release date. There are some exceptions though, like an event announcement."

"Then, if you announce on your blog or twitter before then--"

"Of course not."

"Anything else?"

"Like events, signing meets information...ah, and there's something more important."

"What is it?"

"News like an anime or a cross-media work, especially the animation of the work. Most of the announcements will be made at such events, so there is a need for secrecy until then no matter what."

For myself, I had been handling the news of 'Vice Versa' getting animated cautiously. This is because the staff numbers and money involved in such a large planning is much more than the sales of the light novels. If I did not take leave from school, I suppose I would be terrified of letting slip of the news, to a point where I won't tell my mum either.

"I see...so it's kind of similar to being a voice actor too."

Nitadori said, but I feel that voice actors would always have it tougher than authors.

Once they hear the news for auditioning, they would know that the work was to be animated. They would know of it earlier, and also, there isn't just one work for them. Of course, they can't leak the news, so they'll be very cautious to avoid news of it leaking.

Leaving that aside, I continued,

"If I know of another person's information, I can't talk about it either. During the end-of-year party last year, I learned of some things when I was chatting with the senior authors...it's said that those authors with good contacts will know that a certain person's work is going to be animated."

"I see...they're of the same line of work after all."

"No matter whether it's news about others or oneself, we have to deal with it using the usual attitude. Leaving aside my own news, I can't leak anything about the plot of another author's latest volume."

This is also what I heard--

It's said that in the past, the author or illustrator could go to the editorial branch and obtain a new book from Dengeki Bunko before the official release.

The books are released on the 10th every month, but they would be sent to the editorial branch at the end of the previous month. The editorial branch will give 10 copies to the author. It depends on the holiday dates, but they typically send it out on the 29th or the 30th.

So during this time, from the beginning of the month to the 10th, one can see stacks of new books in the editorial branch. Anyone that shows up early for a meeting can pick it up to read.

In the past, as long as anyone requested for it, he can take the book back (it's not considered part of publishing fees, so it's kind of inconvenient for the author). We can't take them now though, as it's a measure to prevent the plot from being leaked.

"Personal information is like work information; there's a need to keep it a secret."

I added on.

"Amongst the authors I met at the end-of-year meetings, there's someone who completely hid his identity. There's one who openly revealed his personal information, but never revealed a photo of himself."

"Oh, they're just like you, sensei."

"They're like me. Thus, I have to use the information of others as my own and be thoroughly careful with it. I don't have much chance to reveal about myself, so I'm having it easy."

"You don't manage a blog, Facebook, Twitter or anything like that after all."

I nodded.

I couldn't possibly do such things when I have to keep my identity a secret. No, some people might be able to handle this well, but I can't. I'll definitely mess up somewhere.

Thinking about this, I asked Nitadori about something I was really curious about.

"Speaking of which...Nitadori, do you write a blog or something?"

"Ah, erm...I guess..."

Nitadori seemed a little off from her usual, stammering away.

"I did...think that I should open a blog. Especially since I'm taking the role of a named character for the first time."

"But you haven't?"

"Hm, well...I'm a little scared. But not that I'm scared of writing...it's that I'm scared of those hateful comments."

"Ah, I see."

I understood that feeling very well.

The internet is filled with kind and hateful comments.

And also, the hateful comments are the ones more likely to leave an impression.

"Sensei, will you actually care about the thoughts and ratings on the internet? --Actually, this is something I really want to ask."

"Yes, and no."

"In what sense?"

There isn't really any author who doesn't care about the readers' thoughts.

If there is, that person's rather strong.

Including me, authors with published works will care about the thoughts and criticism, very concerned with them, in fact. (Of course, they'll care about their sales volumes.)

In the past, feedback was practically through letters from the readers. Once the works are published, the readers will write to the authors and tell them how they feel.

Thanks to the internet, we're able to know about their thoughts faster than before.

I feel that with the internet community, from anonymous imageboards, personal blogs to Twitter, facebook and other prominent social websites, I'm able to know of the readers' thoughts on the day the books are released.

However, there are good and bad to this.

I never told Nitadori about this. The editorial branch will filter the reader letters, and those slandering letters that would affect an author's confidence will not be sent to the author.

It's different on the internet.

As long as an author looks for it, he'll be able to find unfiltered, belittling remarks.

"Sensei, have you looked at the thoughts regarding your own works?"

The answer is yes. Yeah, I answered briefly.

"Amongst all the works that were released till this point...has anyone said anything bad about your works?"

"Of course. I guess."

Huh? Nitadori muttered as she tilted her head.

"I guess'...what do you mean?"

I answered.

"I chose to forget about it."

As for who taught me this--

To be honest, I forgot.

Was this something I thought of? Or was it what the editor-in-charge or other editors taught me? Was it a suggestion from another author I met somewhere? Or did I learn it from a book.

But when I looked at the reviews on the internet, surely I would do this.

This was the **Just read the good comments, forget the bad ones.**"

Method.

"So basically...how do you go about doing this?"

Nitadori asked as she brought her face closer.

I answered as I looked aside.

"It's not that hard. First--"

I read all the comments I found on the internet until the very end.

There is kindness on the internet.

No, I feel that there's a lot more cases of kindness compared to malice. This is what I think.

If I look for it, I can find,

"It's interesting."

"Looks fun."

"I want to continue reading."

"The characters are really amazing.."

And so on. These are the kind of comments that praise the work, 'nice work'.

And I'll earnestly accept such praises.

While looking, I would express my thanks, and use this praise as motivation.

Also, I would remember the title of that site.

If however,

"What's this? It's so boring."

"Refund me."

"Terrible novel."

Such criticism is written--

If I'm to read such thoughts--

"What will you do?"

"I'll go back immediately."

"Back? Where?"

"To the site praising me."

"Ah!"

Whenever I read the feedback on the internet, I'll always read the ones praising my work.

I'll use that moment to forget all about the comments that belittle and slander my work. I'll always have the thought that someone is willing to praise my work, and end my collection of feedback.

Even if there are those who feel that I'm despicable, I don't intend to give up on this method.

"I see..."

"I did read this line in a book 'someone may belittle a work, but the author should never apologize'."

"Oh?"

"And on the other hand, I have to say without a care 'it is a pity that it doesn't fit your tastes'. When I first read these words, I really couldn't understand, until I became an author...where I really understood this thinking."

"In other words--"

Nitadori gave me a serious look as she told me,

"You cooked up a 'delicious meal', so you don't have to care about those who didn't like it?"

I nodded firmly.

"Right. That's because I had no choice other than to do that. When I write my work, I find it interesting. I don't intend to submit a meaningless work to the editor-in-charge. Also, I'll listen to the editor-in-charge, and edit the work to make it more interesting."

"Yeah."

"That's how a work is born...so no matter what kind of comments there are, I can't do anything about it. If everyone praises it and say that 'it's nice', I'll be happy. However, I know that things aren't going to be like that. I strongly believe that I can't ignore the thoughts of my supporters just because of the negative criticism. Thus, I won't care about it."

Of course, I do believe that there is 'harsh criticism born out of kindness'.

Like for example 'It'll be better if this part is changed like this'. 'This part isn't well written. Better to rewrite it'. I do feel a few times that 'yeah, this guy's right'.

But even so--

An author can't let himself be dragged along by the views of an outsider.

No matter what anyone else says (except for the editor-in-charge), I'll write based on my own thoughts.

If it sells well, it'll be my victory along with the editor-in-charge, and we'll work hard to create the next work.

If it doesn't sell well, it means that we lost. I'll work hard to make sure the next work sells.

"When seeing and hearing reviews about my work--I always think of the Aesop of 'The Miller, the Boy and the Donkey'."

When was the first time I read that story?

I couldn't recall when it was, but I probably won't ever forget about this in my entire life.

"Erm...what kind of a story is it? I think I heard of it somewhere."

Nitadori asked.

"Well, one day, a Miller and his son went out to sell a donkey--"

There was a passer-by who told them, *wouldn't it be easier to ride on a donkey?* So the Miller let his son sit on the donkey.

Another person they met then said, the son shouldn't relax, the father should ride on it. So, the father got the son off, and rode on the donkey instead.

And then, they met someone else, who said that the duo could ride. So, they did.

Then, they met another person, who told them the donkey was pitiful to have two people riding on it.

"Ah! Now I remember!-- They then carried the donkey to ease its burden, so they carried it. But the donkey started moving and fell into the river. That's how the story ends, right?"

"Yep yep."

"So it's an Aesop...I didn't know. This story is saying that without any objective viewpoint, you'll be toyed around by everyone, and end up with misfortune, right?"

"Yeah. Also, an author's predicament can be summarized as this story...there's no novel that can satisfy every reader, so as long as someone praises it, the author will stick to the formula--that's a lesson I can go with."

I saw this story somewhere before.

Whenever an author writes, there's a need for something, something other than a computer, pen and research materials.

That's 'self-confidence'.

The self-confidence to believe that I can write.

The self-confidence to believe that I can write interesting novels.

Thus, I'll borrow the power of my supporters.

In other words, I don't need the power of those who don't support me

"The saying goes that humans will improve as long as they're praised. This definitely goes too for authors."

"Not that 'authors are humans too'?"

"Ah...yeah, that too."

"I did think of how blessed I am as an author."

I suddenly mentioned something Nitadori never asked about.

And having said that, I thought she would be stunned.

"Well...why's that?"

But Nitadori asked. I answered,

"That's because when I write, I'm able to begin writing, and in writing, i can write novels. I don't have to think of myself as an author, but I was happy to learn that I was able to debut, happy that I was able to get a reprint. Once the work started to sell, and the editor-in-charge told me to write continuations, I was happy. The animation of the story also made me happy."

"...Sensei, looking at you, I understand very well that it's your real emotion, not faked, right?"

"Erm, yeah."

I had no acting skills.

"So tell me--sensei, do you think you're special in any sense?"

Unlike before, it was a sharp, piercing question.

I shook my head.

"No, I think I'm someone with a lot of experience, a rare thing in that."

"Then what kind of person do you think is special?"

"I don't know."

"..."

"I don't think such a person exists, right? Ah, if you say that there's a 'very special' person to anyone, I do know about that, like a lover, a family member, and something like that. In other words--"

Nitadori's giving me an intense stare. She looked serious, but it's a little different from the look she showed during the After Record. Then, she continued to ask, seemingly interrupting me,

"It goes by what that person think, is it?"

Overwhelmed by the pressure,

"Sorta...I guess."

I timidly answered.

I looked over at the flowing scenery outside the window, drinking my tea--

I felt that we were going off-topic. What was the question we were talking about anyway?

I wondered.

I capped the plastic bottle as I turned my head to the right, and found Nitadori pondering with a very serious look on her face.

I was worried if I did say something wrong, but in any case, I can't take back what I said. Even if she does ask a similar question again, that's the only way I can answer.

Nitadori turned her face towards me.

She gave a tender look, but the glare behind the glasses was sharp.

"For an author, for every sensei who made their debut till this point, have you encountered any difficulty?"

"Difficulty..."

I heard this question, and muttered to myself as I pondered. I had to think of it separately.

"I guess 'difficulties an author would face' is different from 'difficulties I encountered after becoming an author'."

"Then, sensei, please answer according to your decision."

"In that case...I'll first start with difficulties I encountered..."

"Right."

If it's this question, I'm confident enough to conclude.

I answer briefly, without any concern,

"None."

"Huh?"

"I didn't really have any particular difficulty."

"Erm...is that true?"

"Erm, well, I did say that I'm a fortunate author. Even if I have to mention any issues I faced, I can't think of any."

"..."

Nitadori remained silent, looking stunned.

"I'm really unfortunate to meet such a frivolous guy. Anyone would have met one or two difficulties at least. Hardships allow a person to grow. You won't grow if you don't face any."

I really hoped that she wouldn't have such thoughts.

But even so, I didn't have any. I got nothing.

"The biggest difficulty I had till this point was in Middle School, the tough process I had until I was able to write. I mentioned it before, and that was before I became an author. I did say that I never had a situation an author fears most, that 'the story isn't used at all'...and I did say that I restrain

myself to ignore the harsh reviews on the internet...the volumes I had are selling well...and they're getting adapted into an anime..."

Maybe there are things I can find tough to deal with in such trivial stuff.

For example, like I was harassed by a mean-spirited drunkard on my way to the hotel, or that I spent some time last year focusing on writing novels, and I end up having hip pains at such a young age, and so on.

Even if I wasn't an author, I would be harassed by a drunkard. It'll be another story altogether if there's a special drunkard who specialized in harassing authors (looks like such a story is interesting too).

I adjusted by sitting posture to adapt to the waist pains, and did some sports as well. On mom's recommendation, I went for acupuncture, and for the time being, it's cured.

Thinking about it, I guess there's none.

"E-erm...what kind of difficulties do you think an author would have?"

Nitadori narrowed the focus of her question. This question is within my expectations however.

The biggest issue an author would face--

That would be, if I can't write, or that I don't want to write, my life as an author would die.

Without a job, I wouldn't have income, unable to maintain my lifestyle. It's common for an author to lose his job no matter what.

Authors are irreplaceable. Even if there are few exceptions, the works of that author is such that he's the only one capable of writing it.

This was something I saw in a certain essay, and I could already understand that feeling.

"Is that so...it's not strange to be out of a job at any given moment...I guess voice actors are the same in this sense. They're scared because 'there are as many as they want when it comes to replacing them'."

Nitadori lamented.

I once heard that there are many who aimed to be voice actors, and that it's difficult to actually debut, or break from the intense competition.

Compared to the authors who were able to survive, which one is harder?

I don't know, and of course, Nitadori doesn't. I guess nobody knows.

"So you came to high school to study because of this reason, sensei?"

I nodded.

Of course, this was partly due to the objection I had from the people around me, but in the end, I decided to go along with my will. I did once think that 'I might as well not study', but now, I felt great that I didn't give up on my studies.

'Vice Versa' is selling very well now, and I can continue to write, but I don't know when will it stop being a bestseller. Also, I don't know when I won't be able to write.

In that case, I don't think an experience of 'I wrote novels in my teens, and my work was adapted into an anime' would come in handy.

In comparison, I guess scholastic experience of graduating from high school and college, together with what I learned in school would probably be more useful.

Both looked similar, but in fact, they're different. The 'academic history' and 'life experience as a student' is different. If I could only choose one, it'd be the latter, but I wanted both.

"After graduating from high school, I want to study in college, and at the same time, continue writing...finally, I'll choose to work, try looking for other work."

"Then, assuming that your works become more popular, and you write a lot of them, and for example, you earn a few billion Yen, equivalent to the career earnings of a working adult...will you give up on writing?"

"If that...ends up being the case...I guess I won't be able to give up on writing. I'll be relieved that I won't have to worry about my life expenses, able to write the novels I like, so I'll feel really happy, just like I am now."

"I see."

Was it just me? Nitadori looked relieved when she answered. I really couldn't understand what others are thinking.

"I feel that it'll be an idealistic lifestyle for me to be able to live out my life just by writing--nobody knows what is in store in the future. I feel that I have to first seriously consider the situation when I can't write, or don't feel like writing. Because of this, I need to do what I can do right now, and I guess that will be writing and studying."

"I guess--I'll probably do that too."

Nitadori finally chimed in.

The atmosphere just feels depressing for some reason.

Normally, a 17 year old boy and a 16 year old girl wouldn't be talking about such matters, right?

Shouldn't we be talking about topics where we feel hope for the future, happily discussing our future dreams? Not brood over here, wondering what'll happen if we lose our jobs? How do we prepare for our lives? And stuff like that.

No matter good or bad, I do find that we aren't ordinary.

Of course, we aren't special either.

"Now then, I'm going to change the direction of the topic a little with regards to 'the next question I want to ask an author!'"

Nitadori spoke with a cheerful tone, probably intending to eliminate the depressing mood.

I was about to ask her what kind of question she would be asking, but she asked something really ordinary.

"Sensei, where do you live?"

This had nothing to do with being an author.

It's easy to answer this question.

"West side of the school. You're able to see a new white building opposite, right?"

"Eh? Is it over there?"

Nitadori blinked her eyes, and I nodded, "Yeah."

"It's near school..."

"That's why I chose to study there..."

There's a somewhat large building less than 100m away from our school. It's only 3 years old, somewhat new.

Mom and I moved there last December, and before that, we were living next to that library.

The reason why we chose to move houses was because this place was close to school. It would take me 5 minutes to get home from the school back gate.

"I see. The shorter the return time is--"

"The more time I'll be able to use to write, and mom's working time is a little shorter."

"Well, both aunty and you were able to make this decision without hesitation."

"It's a little far from the library, but we got no choice for that. I have enough money to buy my own books, and able to check information on the internet."

"Did you...buy the house?"

Nitadori's eyes below the glasses widened as she asked.

"Impossible, it's rented."

Besides, I don't earn that much.

But even so, renting a house was expensive. The real estate agent told me when we rented the house that it was probably the most expensive in the area.

Mom was aghast by the high rental, but was against me paying for the rent until the very end. However, I insisted that this was a 'must'.

"The reason for that...well...there's 4--no, 3 of them."

I nearly blurted out my true thoughts, and corrected myself.

Nitadori did not appear to mind about such a mistake, and instead, asked me.

"Assuming that the most important reason is that it's very close to school...the other reason is that the rent's considered as your expense?"

I nodded.

We rented a 4LDK in the building. The 4 rooms include my mom's room, mine, and a storage room used to put a library of bookcases. The last room is for standby just in case something happens, and currently used as a standby storage for books, since I don't know when I'll be using it.

Amongst them, I classified my room and the two storerooms as 'workroom'. They take up about 40% of the place, so I can classify 40% of the rent and utilities bill within my expenses.

The expenses is a lot, but the tax rebate is also rather big.

Also, I'll be staying here for at least two years in high school until I graduate. Luckily for me, I have enough to pay it it.

"And after that?"

"For college, I want to aim for Tokyo."

I answered.

"Oh! You decided on it already?"

Nitadori asked happily.

"Right now, I only decided on 'Tokyo with its literature branch'. Also, the thing about the location is that it's about an hours ride from the editorial branch."

"I see! You want to write and study at the same time? I'm thinking of going to college too if I'm not too busy with my work! I'll choose a school near Tokyo."

"We're going to be entrance students next year...but let's hope we can get in."

"Yep. But let's start working hard from now on!"

Ah, this really feels like a conversation any ordinary high school student will talk about. I'm happy about this.

Nitadori asked,

"So, two years later, if you decide to move to Tokyo, sensei, what about your mother?"

I replied that it that was the case, mom said that she would move to an apartment near the hospital, one with enough space just for herself.

"I see--so, what's the last of the three reasons?"

Nitadori managed to guess two of the reasons, and asked me the final one.

"Because I wanted mom to stay in a better house. When I lived in that old apartment, I would hear noises from my neighbors. Mom moved houses next to the library for my sake initially, so I wish to use this opportunity now to repay her. Go to be prompt with it."

Once she heard my answer,

"Ah! I see... sorry..."

Nitadori frowned once she heard my reply. She looked disappointed in herself, and seemed to be telling herself, "I shouldn't have done that!". There isn't a need for her to do that.

"A-Also, I want to live in a fancy rich house too! That makes it four reasons!"

"Ahaha. Thanks."

My concern was so obvious, and since she thanked me again, I really can't calm down.

"E-erm...I chose the highest floor so that I get a nice view! Well, you see, when writing, I need to rest my eyes, and it'll be great if I can see the hills outside the window!"

"You can see a rather pretty view from the school, but I guess you'll be able to see something better from the roof of that building."

Nitadori seemingly recovered a little as she said so. Thank goodness. We continued our conversation.

"Yeah. The view's really amazing when it's bright out there. My house is very near school. You can visit whenever you want to."

"Eh--!? Really?"

Nitadori looked rather surprised, and I answered,

"It's fine. I don't have anything to hide anyway."

In any case, this probably is the first time in my life that I invited someone to my house; it's a good thing that I rented out an apartment. Also, even though it's not something I may say, but the apartment my mom rented was really old."

"R-really? Ca-ca-can I really g-go-go look at a professional author's workplace? R-really?"

I saw Nitadori's delighted face, and in my heart, I was feeling confused.

Was there really a need to be so frantic and affirm this over and over again?

My room isn't located in some famous theme park located on the Tokyo Bay anyway.

It's definitely a new, pretty room with a nice view--

Nitadori herself appeared to be some rich person.

I gave up on thinking on whatever I didn't know, and intended to tell her the main points,

"But I can't allow it when mom's sleeping, especially when she's working on night shift...I guess the best time will be...on days when she's working?"

"Wh-when she's not at home! R-ri-right! I-I get it!"

"...?"

I looked away from her, thinking carelessly. Mom's duty schedule changes rather often, so I need to be sure first.

"Ra..."

Suddenly, there was a trail of raindrop appearing outside the glass window, and it multiplied quickly.

"Is that the rain...?"

The rain instantly got heavy, and the train continued to race through the rain.

There was still some time until sunset, but it was dark outside the window, probably because the thick clouds covered the sky. There were times when rumblings could be heard, and the rain drenched the windows.

The weather forecast was accurate. If the rain is so big now, what about when we reached Tokyo?

I had to travel a bit from the Iidabashi to the hotel, and my legs might be drenched as a result. However, it's not too far away, and I can call for a taxi.

I felt that it would be easier for me to take this train until the very end and ride on a taxi afterwards, but I decided. 'As long as this train can get me to wherever I need to, I won't need a taxi', so I thought.

I am earning some money, and after deducting some of my life expenses, I will be left with some money. Even if I do occasionally take a taxi in Tokyo itself, I won't end up spending all my money.

However, I won't say 'scrimping is a scourge', but I do try to save whenever I can. It's only when I'm feeling unwell that I take a taxi.

The train passed a few stops, and the carriage was not as packed as before. I had been to Tokyo a few times till this point, but I guess this should be the fewest number of passengers on board.

There's still an hour and a hour to the terminal.

I was wondering what she would be asking next. That interviewer was currently in the washroom.

While spacing out, I found this time to be really boring.

And so, I stood up, and took out the 'Vice Versa' draft I printed from my backpack.

If this is printed as a book, this will become the 11th volume. The 6th chapter of Side 'Shin' is planned to be released on September.

It's already written, but as long as I have the time, I'll read through it again, checking through the chapters and thinking of potential plot developments.

With the increase in number of volumes, the plot of 'Vice Versa' began to change drastically.

In Side Shin, many countries ended up being subjugated or allies of Sin as he aimed to conquer Reputation. The 7th volume had the Country of Movement providing resources and weapons to Sin as thanks for him saving them.

Of course, Yui, who had a crush on Shin in Side Sin, started to have feelings for the serious yet kind Sin, started to falter.

Pluto and Sin crossed swords again in volume 9. However, the country that betrayed Pluto sent an assassin onto the battlefield, hoping to kill them. With Sin and Meek's huge contributions, the assassination plot never happened.

Pluto decided to ally herself with Sin and work together. The war expanded on a larger scale in volume 11, and the two countries fought together.

And so, in this volume, Meek died.

I had planned on Meek's death for a long time.

Speaking of which, in the plot I thought of, basically almost all the homunculus would die.

Some of these homunculus would obediently follow their masters and die in battlefield. Some were executed by their Masters for partaking in treacherous acts and assisting rebel leaders.

I too felt that the plot was too dark, but I really created these artificially created beings based on this concept, so I got no choice with this. In contrast, I'll try my best to avoid letting the other characters die.

After seeing that Meek would die in the draft, the editor-in-charge said,

"Meek and Doska are pretty and popular homunculus. Isn't it better not to let them die?"

I had the opposite thinking though. I feel that since they're pretty and popular, their deaths will cause an impactful, tragic element to the plot, cooking up the atmosphere of the story.

I guess if fans of Meek and the others are to hear of this, they'll be enraged.

"Who died and made you king?"

They might even say this.

But in my novel--I'm the God.

I created the world, the characters and their fates. The voice actors inject life into them, but the author can kill them.

If I hear that,

"I'm God, so what?"

I guess I might try replying that.

But currently, I don't have the chance to do that.

I checked through the part in the draft where Meek was to die.

At the end of this volume, there would be a massive battle on a wide grassy field between armies of many countries. It would end with Sin, Shin and Pluto's camps winning.

After they returned to the main camp, Pluto said to Sin, who lost many of his subordinates and two family aides,

"My side lost Meek."

And upon hearing that, Shin responded,

"I see."

Shin in turn,

"..."

Stood there without a word (it wasn't winter, so he didn't have his usual muffler on)

Pluto never did mention of Meek's final moments.

When we discussed this volume,

"Is this really okay?"

The editor-in-charge noted; it seemed he was more taken aback then he was during the plot.

Shouldn't an important character's death be more vividly described? In a certain sense, this was an expected response.

Then, I mentioned what was in my mind.

Of course, I did think of a valiant, beautiful death, like shielding her master from an arrow, and dying while standing straight up like Musashibo Benkei.

However, I depicted such a death scene for another homunculus.

That was how Dasko would die in the plot later of. When the master was pursued to a narrow corridor, Dasko blocked the enemy's thrown spear with his abdomen, and laid by the side, blocking the enemy's pursuit. He continued to fight on until the very end.

Meek's death was the complete opposite.

Anyone who read war biographies would know that the deaths on a real battlefield is so merciless, so brief.

Turn a head around, and a comrade's head was gone. Moving forward, the fellow soldiers begin to disappear. Fly in the air, after the military plans pass through the clouds, one is gone. Think that a buddy's not hurt externally, and the next day, he's lying icy cold on the bed.

I feel like I'm writing 'I dropped quite a bit of pocket change, and I tried to pick it up, but I found that there's several thousand yen gone, not just a thousand or two.' What I'm trying to depict is a battlefield where human lives are easily lost.

"Ah, if that's the case..."

The editor-in-charge agreed with this begrudgingly, and then said,

"But it's fine if you rewrite that entire part now. Yep, no problems at all."

I knew very well that he was implying "can you please rewrite this part~?"

But as long as nothing special actually happens, I won't change it.

As for what that 'special' is--

I didn't know at all.

Nitadori returned, and I finished checking through my script.

I put the draft into the large brown draft bag with the words ASCII Media Works, and slipped that bag into my backpack. Before Nitadori sat down, I put the backpack onto the rack.

Nitadori continued to tidy her hair for a while, before sitting down, and said,

"What that...the draft?"

"Yeah. That's the draft of the 11th volume to be sold in September."

"Wow! I want to read it!"

Nitadori lifted her head to look at the rack.

"No can do. Not when I'm watching."

"This means...it's fine as long as you aren't around, right? Hey, sensei, there's a trillion Yen at the washroom."

Of course, I knew that she was joking.

"I see. It'll take you a long time to hand it over to the police, is it? If you take 10% of that money-- please treat me to a beef bowl."

"I really have to hand it to you--well, I won't just go around peeking into your stuff, sensei. But if the draft's stolen before the work's published, that will be really troublesome, right..."

Nitadori said, and drank the tea.

She's right I thought.

If the bag itself was stolen or snatched away, the situation would be serious.

A laptop contained data, but at the very least, it contained a password. This isn't the case for a draft though.

If someone with ill intent is to pick up a draft of the 'Vice Versa' continuation, what would happen?

"I tried writing a sequel. Everyone, please look at my second work!"

That person would probably post something like this on the internet, I guess?

In that case, what'll happen to the real draft of mine.

If I release the light novel without changing the work--

"A professional author just copied a work from the internet!"

The readers would probably think this way.

If that's the case, I'll probably show the date of the file and sue him in court, maybe? Shall I fill in the report form first? How do I report? With which agency?

"Sensei?"

If I have to go for a court case, ASCII Media Works will probably do something, right? The company will pay for what seems to be some extremely expensive lawyer fees, right?

I'll appear in court in a suit, right? I really want the judge's gavel that's used whenever he hits it and shouts 'silence!'. But Japanese judges don't actually use gavels, so I don't know where to get one.

Or maybe the editorial branch won't want to context (what they think is) a very troublesome court case, and have a change of attitude, and told me 'too troublesome to fight a court case! Rewrite this! It's a chance to make the story more interesting', I guess?

"Sensei?"

However, a plot I had been writing for quite a while isn't something that's easy to change, right? Won't I lose the direction if I change it drastically? If the series is to be ruined because of this, what'll happen to all the hard work I put in till this point?

"Hey, sensei?"

But in that case, I might as well change directions and write 'Side Sin' into one endless barrage of comedy, and continue to quietly write 5 volumes of developments that'll shock the readers. After a while, I'll switch back to 'Side Shin' and continue writing one serious story after another--

"Hey!"

Twack! I felt a light hit on my shoulder.

"Hm?"

I turn to the rest, and saw Nitadori seated there, rubbing her right hand with her left. She then muttered,

"Your shoulders...are stiff..."

"Beef?"

"I'm saying that your shoulders are stiff! I've called you a few times!"

Ah, I see. I guess my thoughts went far away because of my delusions. For a moment, I didn't know what to say.

"I'm an author..."

I'm getting a little confused.

"You're not recovered yet?"



"No, I'm fine, yep."

"Great! I guess your shoulders are different from a girl's!"

"Eh? Erm, yeah--no, that's not it."

I don't know how soft are a girl's shoulders, so I corrected myself.

And then, I said,

"Erm, where were we at?"

"We talked about the part where 'what if the draft's stolen'--forget about this part. Let's talk about the next question!"

Nitadori said as she regained her smile,

"Sensei, what do you think 'is important for an author to do'? I think it's difficult to ask 'what's the thing 'you pay attention to most'. You can say anything you want, as long as you find it important."

Luckily, she didn't ask me what's the most important thing, or else I would have spent a long time thinking about it.

But if it's 'important', I can think of a few.

"First--"

"First?"

"I think I should be studious and make notes. Jot down everything I think of."

The job of an author is to put everything together, and write it all down into a story. Any point always start with a moment of inspiration.

"When do you get an inspiration?"

"Hm, the answer to that is...'I don't know'."

I answered honestly,

"Hm?"

Nitadori tilted her head.

"To be honest, I really don't know. There's always a random moment when I have an inspiration, and when I think about it, that's the moment of inspiration."

"I see--so what about when you say 'right, let's get down to writing' and sit in front of the computer?"

"Of course I do...in fact, it's tougher for me to think of sentences and plot. I feel that most of my inspiration don't show up at those times though. When an inspiration shows itself, that's the time to take notes."

"Then, up till now, when do you start to have 'inspiration'?"

I can answer that question.

"For example--"

The easiest example would be when I'm enjoying other works. As long as I'm moved by something, I'll have the desire to directly connect that inspiration with my delusions. This can be said to be my act of 'taking books as toys' which I had been doing since young. Right now, I can also turn manga and anime into toys, though recently, I do feel that it's an act of 'taking inspirations'.

At the same time, when I'm listening to music, whenever the lyrics or melody gets me excited, my mind will suddenly think of images. I'll use it as the background music, develop all kinds of delusions, and gain inspiration from it.

Another situation is the complete opposite to this, when I'm spacing out. Like when I'm having a shower, using the bathroom, and, though it's not a good thing, even during lessons. When I relax, my mind will suddenly come up with ideas. In the past, I would often end up in plot lines where I don't know how to write, and I'm troubled by it. Most of the inspiration for such plot lines would suddenly appear in my mind when it's emptied.

Also, it happens when I'm focused on doing other things. For me, I do often come up with inspirations when I'm riding a bicycle steadily on a flat road.

"I see...there really is a variety of them."

"Hm, so as long as I have an inspiration, I'll definitely jot it down. I won't note it down with a pen unless it's during class; I'll use my computer or my smartphone and record my inspiration as words. I'll always tell myself 'I can't complain about it being a hassle'."

"So I guess you'll forget after all?"

I nodded firmly in response to that.

"Right, because I'll forget--man's memory really is unreliable, and everything we think of, we'll forget. We'll even forget the points we thought of. The proof of that is that for a certain scene in a certain story, I thought of it 3 times in all."

"Eh? Why's that?"

"Back then, I had the idea 'I thought of a very touching scene! This character had such an experience, so let's use this!' and then, I'll record it in my smartphone. When I'm in my room, ready to enter the same scene into my Word file on the computer, when i open the file--"

"You find that the same scene is there?"

"Yes. That scene exists already. And then, I also mentioned in the file 'this is the second time I thought of this iea'."

Ideas do appear suddenly.

And then, they'll vanish immediately.

It'll be a waste if I don't record it down properly.

As I said, I might repeat the same plot point a few times--and there are probably quite a few points I forgot.

Thus, whenever I have an inspiration, no matter how stupid it is, I'll record it down. I'll record it completely, and keep it safe somewhere so that I can use it in the future.

The senior authors too did say the same thing.

I heard that one senior author would often have ideas whenever he's driving. He'll then record it down through voice. He'll often bring a voice recorder into his car, and have it placed right next to the driver's seat. It's said that even without looking, he can tap the record button with one hand.

And as I heard, whenever he's driving at night or on long distance, listening to music he likes, the moments of inspiration appear more often. This is similar to me riding on my bicycle.

It appears that person does drive around often to change his mood. He would race however he wanted to on a nearby highway in the middle of the night.

I do think it's kind of cool to drive on the highway in the middle of the night looking for inspiration.

When I'm at the age where I can obtain a license, I do plan to go for driving classes. Thus, I set as expenses for that part.

"I see...taking notes..."

Nitadori muttered as she wrote down something on the opened notebook with a little pen she took out. She's taking notes.

I'm just staring at her, not leaning over to peek.

"Oops."

But she covered the notebook, and glared at me from beneath the glasses.

She slammed the notebook shut, and asked,

"Anything else? Is there anything that's important?"

"Well...hm, there is."

"What is it?"

"It's a little repeat on what I said before 'it's important to be confident in myself'--don't look down on myself, and whatever I'm writing."

This was when I was editing the draft of 'Vice Versa'.

Back then, I was a first year in high school, 15 years old.

When I was working so hard to edit the draft, I suddenly had a thought.

Was this novel really worth publishing?

"So...it's something like being uneasy?"

Nitadori asked. Looking at her expression, I seemed to see a doctor who's very worried for her patient.

"Right. I really had a thought in my head, whether the novel that appears in my eyes is really suited for selling and earning money. The life experiences I gained in life isn't enough, so can I really release this novel I wrote based on my reading experiences as a commercial product? Thoughts like that."

"But...the one who decides on that is the editor-in-charge, right?"

"Yes. But back then, I was so scared that I couldn't think calmly. Thus, I gave the editor-in-charge a call, begging him tearfully."

I find it embarrassing, but it was a fact, so I was left with no choice on this matter. Also, when explain this, there's something else regarding the past I have to mention.

"In the end?"

"In the end--"

The editor-in-charge,

"In other words, you're wondering if your novel is shallow?"

Right right. I said this while holding onto the receiver firmly.

"It's fine to think that way. Just write a novel only you can write at this moment."

The editor-in-charge was blunt in his response.

For an author, life experiences are very important. I feel that many creative works are born as a result for that.

However, the saying that 'I can't write because I never experienced it' does not necessarily hold true.

No author would create a murder experience for the sake of narrating a killer's mental state (that's what I think, and I hope to be the case).

So don't look down on yourself, and write your own work.

I understood very well the meaning of those words said to me as I continued with my work.

Soon after, when I become an adult and read through 'Vice Versa' again, I might think,

"So this is the novel I wrote when I was younger."

But as long as I could think,

"This is a novel I could only write when I was younger."

It'll be fine,

"This is an entertainment novel, so if you find it interesting, anything goes. If it's interesting, the readers will be happy. You're young, but you're able to write a fun story--so no matter what, you have to abandon your troubles and continue writing. That will bear fruit."

The editor-in-charge mentioned this over the phone.

And I too repeated the same words to Nitadori.

"I see...it's really amazing, I feel. For example, if 10 years passed since you started, when you're 27, sensei, what kind of novel will you write?"

I started to imagine my future in response to Nitadori's question, an ideal future where I'm successful in anything I do.

My dream is to continue writing 'Vice Versa' and focus on the series as much as possible. Based on the current plan, I feel that it'll end at 20 volumes or so.

I had already decided on the final developments. When I wrote the first volume, I had a vague idea on what I was going to write for the ending, and after discussing it with the editor-in-charge, the ending was decided.

I don't know how fast I can continue to maintain my volume releases this year as I repeat it, and next year when I take the Entrance Exams, but in these 3-4 years, I simply want to continue focus on writing 'Vice Versa'.

If the anime sells out well, I'll be delighted. If there's a second season, or even a continuation thereafter, I'll be even more delighted.

I want to enter college, and study while writing a new series. Right now, I still don't know which of the inspirations I have that I should use.

And then, after I graduate, I'll find work--

This is the ideal future I can think of, but of course, the future may not be that successful for me.

I may end up failing my exams, and if the anime doesn't gain much discussion, the discs not selling well, and the popularity of 'Vice Versa' declining heavily, the series gets aborted before it reaches volume 20, I felt dejected, unable to write the next work.

Or I may end up with some mental or physical disease that made me unable to continue writing or attend school. Worse, I might end up in a fatal accident. I can't be sure that such things won't happen to me.

Thinking about this, I don't want to continue thinking.

What kind of novel? I thought of what Nitadori asked me again, and answered,

"Well...I'll probably use my past experiences and write a story about college students? Or a story about people working in society? A novel about authors?"

"What about a story about voice actors?"

I saw Nitadori say this with a somewhat expectant look on her face, and I had an idea,

"Not bad. The protagonist is a high school girl who works as a voice actress, with long hair, bespectacled--"

"Yeah yeah."

Nitadori chimed in happily,

"When she brought her dog out for a walk, she picked up a mysterious mushroom, and became a giant. She went around destroying cities while looking for horse sashimi. A giant machine of the JSDF went over--"

"Right right! I'll take half of that model appearance fee. Get down to work!"

Nitadori threatened me happily,

"I-I'll try writing this soon..."

Saying that, I reached my hand out for my smartphone, intending to record this idea.

"Also, is there anything else important for an author?"

"Yep."

"And that is?"

"Stick to the deadline"

"It's here! The 'deadline'--speaking of which, I never exactly asked about the deadline before."

I nodded. Now that she mentioned it, I didn't explain it properly either.

"Now then, let's explain about the deadline."

"Please do!"

Deadlines--

Of course, it refers to the latest day the novel has to be completed.

Magazines have deadlines. Books have deadlines.

In my case of writing a pocket book--when publishing a book under Dengeki Bunko, when exactly is the deadline?

Most likely, only those involved would know. At that moment, I was frustrated as to whether I should tell Nitadori.

But though I was frustrated, as before, she was someone 'involved with this work',

"Please keep whatever I say now as a secret."

"Got it."

I believed her, and continued on,

"The deadline for Dengeki Bunko works would be typically set as '4 months before the official release'."

"Hm...in that case, if the volume is to be released on the 10th next month--"

"In June, that means that I have to finish my manuscript at the end of February."

"That's rather early..."

Nitadori muttered.

I too felt this way when I first heard of this. Assuming that the books are to be printed at the end of May, what will they be doing for 3 months?

I only knew of the entire process in the end, so I told Nitadori.

"Well, assuming that I finish the work at the end of February, finish my manuscript."

"Yes?"

Nitadori opened the notebook, and began to write something. She probably intends to convert the process into a flow chart or something.

"The original draft will become the first manuscript, and as mentioned before, it'll be sent to the reviewers. They will take about 2 weeks to do that before sending it back to the editorial branch."

"Oh--that's long."

"Yes, it's very long. A certain author once said that he would plan a very long vacation during that time. If there's no other work during that time, he'll be really free."

"I see. So after 2 weeks...you'll receive the draft from the reviewers...then your own checks..."

"Author review."

"Right. You'll send the author review back to the editorial branch for the second manuscript review, right? How long will it take until it returns to the editorial branch?"

"Typically about a week and a half until 2 weeks. Once the second manuscript is settled, the original will be sent to the printers along with the illustrations. There's still another 2 months left, so I suppose they could easily print the books with much ease."

"I see..."

The sound of Nitadori's pen reaching stopped.

And this would be the end of the explanation about the deadline--as if.

"Now that'll be the schedule for the abnormally 'obedient kid'."

"Huh?"

Nitadori's glasses turned to me.

"This thing that's commonly called the 'obedient kid schedule'."

I said.

Of course, this term wasn't coined by me. I heard a senior author say it before, and this is a term that somehow popped up between authors and editors.

"..."

Nitadori thought for a few seconds.

"In other words...4 months before the release is basically the ideal deadline?"

I nodded.

"That's the case. And there are quite a lot of authors who won't follow that deadline. They'll do what we call 'delaying the deadline'."

"In that case...how does the schedule go?"

Nitadori flipped the notebook open, and it appeared she intended to take notes again, but I feel that it's a little waste of effort.

"I can't really explain in detail. The schedule will differ according to the author's progress at that point."

"..."

Nitadori tucked the pen into her notebook, and slammed it shut.

I continued to explain.

I said that the deadline was 4 months before the release.

Those that could abide were obedient kids.

There were really a lot of people who wouldn't abide by it. If I have to ask which one is more common--according to what I hear, it's undoubtedly the latter.

I hear that Dengeki Bunko would first decide on the release schedules within the next half year to one year.

Of course, the plan isn't really set in stone, but during this time, the editors and authors would have conversations like 'which volume will be released this month'.

The release schedules is made, partially based on the decision to make promotions, like,

"It's going to be animated, so let's publish this book on this month".

"This series has been providing releases every March, so again, let's set it to March."

"There'll be works of awardees published in February, so we'll release the works of those that won awards in the past"

(Because of this, in every February, the new books would be put together with the winners of that year, and the book collar on it would have the works 'UU Winner of the XXth OO Awards.' also, there won't be works of authors like me who did not win any award.)

"In this promotion fair, we shall bundle all the popular works together."

Of course, authors know of the 'obedient kid deadline'--

But though they knew, they might not be able to do it.

Sometimes, there was absolutely no chance to make it based on the writer's speed and the other work at hand. Or I should say, it's very common.

Amongst them, there's those that finish the 'previous work' on the day before. In other words, they were warriors who would begin writing after the obedient kid deadline.

"Can they make it?"

"Those are the ones who would 'make sure to make it'. Because they're able to make sure the manuscript makes it, even if they don't rush it, the authors and editors are rather calm, I think."

Every author's writing speed to complete a light novel volume will differ. Some require 3 months, some require 3 weeks.

However, the common point between most authors is that 'the closer it is to the deadline, the faster the writing speed'.

A senior author I met at the end-of-year party said before,

"Right! The energy hidden within the body will be released. I can feel the burning flames within my body. I want to pass on this passion to the readers."

It sounded cool, but I just felt that it was fire lit on his bum. Of course, I did not say that though.

"Even if they do delay, I guess...there's still a limit to it, right?"

What Nitadori asked really made sense.

"Of course there is. In other words, I think that's the real deadline."

"So...when exactly is that?"

Nitadori leaned over to me, probing as she asked.

"I don't know...till now, I never had a problem with the deadlines."

I never tried to test the limits, so I didn't know.

"You're a good kid!"

"Th-thanks."

"Want me to pat your head?"

Nitadori chirped happily, quickly raising the left hand that's near me.

"No-no need for that."

I panicked, and refused her.

It'll be awkward for me if my hair's oily. It's embarrassing to let a girl pat my head after all.

"Really?"

Nitadori looked a little displeased as she moved her hand back to her thighs.

I continued to explain the deadlines.

"According to what I heard at the end-of-year party, it is very common to see authors who are late by two weeks."

"Are there later ones?"

"There are those cases of dragging on by a month or longer."

"So in other words, a book that's to be published in June--"

"It's not done at the end of February, March passed, still writing in April, that kind of feeling."

"And they can still make it..."

"To be precise, I think it's the hard work of the editors that allowed for the books to make it on time."

"I see."

"But if in the meantime, there's the end of year or the Golden Week, there wouldn't be enough time, so we got to be careful. Many companies will take leaves. This period is commonly called the 'end of year catchup' or the 'Golden Week catchup'."

When an author abides by the obedient kid's deadline, the editorial branch will have more than enough time to go through first reviews and second reviews--

The longer an author's manuscript drags on, the more pressing the situation will be. The illustrator, checkers, printers and editorial branch would all be affected.

What I'm going to say next is what I heard from the editorial branch and other authors. Currently, I haven't done so, and I don't ever intend to do it.

"It's said that if the draft drags on for too long...they'll have no choice but to cut off the second review to make it in time for the progress. Of course, there'll be a higher chance of errors."

"What's supposed to be two checks ended up becoming one check anyway."

"Yeah. If it drags on so long until it gets serious, they'll pick up the method of 'submitting in parts'.

Submitting in parts would refer to a relay of submitting the manuscript.

After an author is done with the draft, he'll send it to the editorial branch, which is the submitting part. The editorial branch would also hand the files over to the checkers and the printers, and that act itself is also submitting.

Thus, partial submission to refer to,

"It refers to sending over the completed parts because the manuscript is not fully completed (because that bastard of an author just wouldn't finish it)."

That would be the last resort.

"I see...in other words, try to make sure the manuscript makes it on time, right?"

"If they don't do it, the volume really won't be able to be published...but I don't want you to misunderstand. When they really can't make it, a professional author will inform the editor-in-charge before hand, asking him to delay the projected release date. Thus, for those that don't do that, they'll definitely finish the draft even if they have to stay up for a few days."

"Oh, just like an author."

"I'm an author."

So it's used in this particular part this week, though it's a little different somewhere.

Feeling somewhat strange, I continued on,

"I feel that since the editor-in-charge understands this logic, he'll trust the author. All the matters is that there's an interesting work written at the end."

"Phew, hearing that makes me really tense! It's like 'there's still three days! No time to sleep!' that kind of feeling."

Nitadori smiled as though she had nothing to do with this,

"I'll...definitely make sure not to end up in such a situation..."

I muttered.

I don't want to stay up late to work, and I have no confidence that I can complete my work while staying up all night.

If someone asks me to finish writing a hundred pages in the next 3 days, I'll probably be crushed by the pressure rising up my head. I'll think of running away.

And thus, this is one place that shows an author's actual personality.

Some would stick to the obedient kid's deadline as a target and abide by it.

Some would give up on abiding by the deadline right from the beginning, and would often delay their work by 2-3 weeks.

Some would delay the manuscript such that they'll submit it a month later.

There is also the possibility of those who would start writing after the obedient kid's deadline, engage in a skirmish with the editorial branch, and barely manage to make it until 2 months later.

I drank my tea, and realized something.

And thus, I capped the bottle, asking Nitadori,

"This deadline thing reminds me of something...I never told you anything about the illustrators, right?"

"No! Sorry--I mean yes, you haven't."

And while Nitadori blurted out this strange mistake, I said,

"Alright, how about we talk about this?"

"Please do!"

The reason why I would link from the deadlines to the illustrators is that there is also a deadline of an illustrator's work. If it passes the deadline, the book won't be released.

I heard that there are cases of the author finishing the work early, but the book was unable to be published because of the illustrator--

Such cases are quite common. When that happens, even authors can't do anything about it.

This isn't my personal experience, so let's leave that aside for now.

The illustrator for 'Vice Versa' is someone with outstanding art skills, and works really fast.

That illustrator's able to match the release dates of mine that are considered quite fast, and whenever it is done, the illustrator would read through the story before providing illustrations of high quality.

That illustrator really helped me out greatly--my heartfelt thanks truly are hard to express.

In light novels, illustrations are important.

It is said that,

"For a work to sell out very well from the beginning, illustrations are key. For a work to sell for a long time, story is key."

When someone enters a bookstore and sees the cover, assuming that the cover illustrations are really attractive, 'how active will this character be?' they'll be curious and start to read.

But after almost two years as a light novel author, I have a slightly different thinking to this.

"For a work to sell out very well from the beginning, illustrations are key. For a work to sell for a long time, story is key, but the influence of illustrations are also very important."

That is what I think.

"I see...speaking of which, how do you choose an illustrator? Do they go by an author's wishes and choose one?"

Nitadori asked.

That was also one thing I wanted to know about before I became an author.

"Sometimes, they will go by the author's wishes. I do know of some authors who are like that. Those authors noticed a certain illustrator on some doujinshi or website, and requested to work with that illustrator, and the editorial branch agreed to it. However, typically--"

"Typically?"

"The editor-in-charge would choose one, and that's the case for me."

"I see. So how was it chosen for you case, sensei?"

That was during Spring Break two years ago, before I entered high school.

I was desperately correcting the manuscript for the 1st volume of 'Vice Versa', and writing the draft for the 2nd volume--

"I think this one's suitable. What do you think?"

The editor-in-charge sent me some doujinshi released by a certain illustrator, and the web address.

I had a look at the doujins immediately, and back then, I didn't have internet at home, so i went to look at the website from a cafe.

The first thoughts I had back then was--

"Your thoughts were?"

"To be honest...I didn't really have much feeling about it."

Nitadori widened her eyes beneath the glasses, and leaned forward enthusiastically.

"Is that so? --I really like the illustrations of 'Vice Versa'. I feel that the visuals of the anime are pretty, and has the key features pat down, but I prefer the illustrations in the novel. Ah...please keep this a secret from the anime personnel..."

"Ahaha, I know--now that I think back about it, I'm able to feel that, yeah, it's great."

"Erm...when you saw the illustrations for the first time, how did you answer the editor-in-charge?"

"I honestly told what I was thinking to the editor-in-charge, and then I said, 'but about the illustrations, I don't really know. Please decide'."

"Then...maybe you wanted to say 'this person can't do, please switch to someone else', right?"

"Well, the chances of that isn't zero."

And Nitadori said,

"Huh...I'm surprised."

She leaned her back on the backrest.

"But back then, I didn't have the time to propose an alternative."

Back then, I was correcting the manuscript. I ended up correcting the first volume until the 6th manuscript, and after doing so until the end, I was thinking, *How is it possible to have so many changes?*

"Finally, the editor-in-charge chose that person. That person did provide some illustrations for some single volume financial magazines, but never had experience drawing light novel characters. However, I heard that the illustrator was really enthusiastic, and according to what I heard, the reply to the editor-in-charge was 'please let me do this!'"

"Ohh!"

"And so, we met once."

That was in the middle of April, when I was in my first year. Back then, I was finally done editing 'Vice Versa'.

This illustrator read through the draft of the first volume that was yet to be completed carefully.

And then, the illustrator brought a few rough sketches of the main characters, and basically all the appearing characters too, drawing them to fine detail.

Looking at the illustrations, I thought.

Ah, so Shin and Sin look like this.

"Was it perfect?"

"It was a little different--for me, perfect would mean that the illustration fits the imagination in my mind completely."

"Then...?"

Nitadori looked surprised. Well, I can't fault her for this. I should have explained beforehand."

"I didn't have any character visualization in my mind. All my mind could see were 'Shin', 'Sin' and words, no clear image."

"Then...is it the same now? Is it the same now that you're writing with available illustrations?"

I nodded firmly.

"It's the same now too. While I'm writing, Shin is *Shin*--in kanji, it can be written as makoto. In my mind, Shin isn't converted into an image, but directly extracted as a word. It has been the case ever since I started writing light novels."

"Ah..."

Nitadori let out a voice with a stunned look.

It was to be expected. Even I didn't know why I didn't have an image of the characters in my mind.

Also, the illustrator helped me out in another way.

And that would be designing the characters' costumes and equipment design.

"I'm unfamiliar with costumes, so leaving aside the Middle Ages style fashion Reputation had, I just don't understand...the current trendy clothing. I did buy some trendy magazines for reference...but I still didn't know. When I was introducing the clothing in those paragraphs, the strange rhythm really was interesting."

"Hmm, like 'something's is a must', 'matching of this soft material', 'A cute style needed', and something, like that, right?"

'Yep yep. That's it.'

"Then when writing 'Vice Versa', the illustrator's very familiar with current fashion, and designed them for you, right?"

"Right. I'll write in the draft '(clothing design is unconfirmed, leave it to the illustrator)'. Of course, if it's something related to the plot...for example, the clothing is used for some plot or some foreshadowing, I'll try my best to think about it. Basically however, I'll leave it all to the illustrator."

"And then?"

"The illustrator reads through the first draft, and sends me proposals for the design of the characters' clothing, either a rough sketch or some information. And then, I'll edit my draft based on the suggestion."

"I see..."

I drank some tea to soothe my throat.

"What kind of person is the illustrator? All I know is the name."

Nitadori took out the first volume of 'Vice Versa' from her bag, looked at the cover, and asked me.

And then, she looked at the illustrator introduction on the cover flap.

Horizontal words were written on it, the pen name, 'I live in Tokyo, I love kotatsu and cats', a 'I'll do my best' to show the enthusiasm, and the web address.

I recalled about the illustrator, wondering how much I could divulge.

The information an illustrator would reveal would differ based on different people. Many would only reveal their names.

I heard that there was a myriad of reasons. They include ordinary working adults, designers, game company staff, animators, and so on.

There were also those with famous pen names, only to deliberately work with another pen name in light novels. In this situation, some would declare it openly, and some would not, but one could tell who they were through the art style. There were those who were unrecognized, and so at the end of year lucky draw, they would admit 'it's me'.

As for the 'Vice Versa' illustrator--

That illustrator did reveal some brief personal information on the site, and as far as I knew, would attend doujinshi sales platforms.

Thus, I decided to tell Nitadori about some brief information people would have found out if they really looked into it.

"Of course, the illustrator's older than me. 20 years old back then, 5 years older than me, so I'm guessing the illustrator is 22 years old now. I heard of this from the editor-in-charge. Typically, an illustrator would be younger than an author, and there many in their twenties."

"So what kind of person is this illustrator?"

"Hm, simply put, it's a 'pretty older sister'. Like--"

"It's a female!?"

Nitadori's reaction was rather exaggerated. This wasn't a hyperbole; her face was leaning towards me, and she grabbed onto me, ostensibly not letting go.

I retreated as I said,

"Re-really? You didn't know? --Ah, I see. I guess you really won't know if you didn't go to a doujinshi exhibition and meet her..."

"What kind of person is she?"

'Well....if I have to say, a pretty lady.'

The illustrator's a beauty, one of a different mold from Nitadori.

The impression she gives is that of a diminutive person, with a slender figure. When she first met me at the editorial branch and got up to greet me, I was taken aback by how low her eyes were.

The hair dyed chestnut brown was at shoulder length, and I wasn't sure about the clothing, but in any case, it gave a plain vibe.

My impression of it was basically 'a new arts teacher'.

Nitadori said as she leaned her body back,

"I-I didn't know...I thought...it would have been a man."

"Well, you probably wouldn't know if nobody actually mention it. She's able to draw some very cute female characters, and the male characters muscles are ripped too."

Actually, this illustrator is a muscle enthusiast, but I never told Nitadori about this.

Because of that, Sin's subordinates were all machos.

The characters had no elaborately designed clothes, and based on her preferences, they would show off their biceps, or their calves while wearing shorts (all I wrote in the story was 'just some ugly men').

The generals had to be muscular men, and it seemed that was the only part she would not concede on. She once said "there's nothing prettier than a toned tricep surae!" Just to note, she's referring to the calves.

"Erm...sensei...it's very rude, but I want to ask something..."

"Hm. What is it?"

"Do you...have to meet that illustrator during meetings?"

That's not the case. In fact, the authors and illustrators hardly meet.

I shook my head, saying,

"No, the discussions with the illustrator is done by the editor-in-charge over the phone. The editor-in-charge deals with the cover, the color illustrations, and where the illustrations are to be. I'll only request when I have vivid images in my mind."

"So after you're done with your meetings, you two would have a meal with the editor-in-charge...or something like that?"

"We only had it once in the beginning. Back then, we're so tense that we hardly talked."

"Do you have her mail address or contact...?"

"I do know--"

"Will you send messages to her?"

"No, of course not. That's because it's pointless for me even if I do know her mail address. The editor-in-charge would be CCing the files to her and me anyway."

"I-I see..."

In fact, the number of times I met the illustrator can be counted with one hand. However, we did talk a lot.

"Two years ago, when I first attended the end of year party, we had a long chat. Neither of us knew of anyone else at the place, so we were at a corner, shivering away."

"To-together?"

"That's because when we saw the namecards of the people walking in front of us, we realized that those were really big names. Of course we'll be terrified. Both of us were going 'ohh! I found this sensei!', 'that sensei's walking in front of me!'" and so on, and that's how we somehow established the conversation."

At the end of my first year in high school, I attended my first ever Dengeki end of year party. I was really delighted.

As I said before, both of us were nervous right from the start, and intended to stay in the corner the entire time. Let us just watch those authors and illustrators happily.

"Found you!"

The editor-in-charge however dragged us out, and brought us everywhere to greet.

"It's him! The High School Boy author!"

And then, I was going around greeting everyone.

Us rookies, the illustrators and me, went around greeting everyone.

The illustrator's a beauty, so she's very popular (amongst the guys, at least).

As for me, I was viewed like an exotic animal, and somewhat popular. Back then, I was so scared that I was frozen stiff, so I couldn't remember what I said.

During the lucky draw, the illustrator won a portable game console, and for her speech, she said,

"It's my 4th one, and I think I might break it again, but I'm really happy! Thank you everyone! I'll try to make sure it lasts until Spring!"

That triggered a massive laughter from the crowd (I heard from the editor-in-charge that she really destroyed it last March. He said that it was not a good thing to use it while having a bath.)

"Can I talk a little more about Dengeki's end of year party?"

I asked.

"Of course you can. Please continue to say what you did with that illustrator in detail."

Nitadori agreed, speaking with such harsh stare and strange words.

Dengeki Bunko's end of year party invites all the authors and illustrators to participate. Basically, anyone who worked under Dengeki Bunko or the Dengeki Bunko magazine flagship are invited to participated.

The date was on a certain Friday in December, and the location was at a massive plaza located close to the editorial branch in Tokyo.

I, a first year in High School when I debuted, was invited as well.

It was nerve wrecking, but I was looking forward to meeting many of the senior authors (not meeting them face to face though), so I decided to participate.

Dengeki Bunko organizes two gathering events for authors to meet.

The first would be the 'Dengeki Awards Ceremony' and the after party. The other would be the end of year.

I did not receive any awards, so I was not invited to receive any prizes. Thus, I was not sure how the award ceremony went.

I heard that there were a lot of people gathered in the hall--including the Chairman and the CEO, and there was a rather solemn ceremony held. It seemed the winners would walk up the stage, receive the trophy, and state their thanksgiving.

I had already debuted by the time I knew of this, and I felt it was a good thing that I did not try to force myself to win an award. I did not tell Nitadori about this.

However, it was said that the winners in that batch would meet and get to know each other, exchanging numbers.

Knowing acquaintances right from the beginning might help one build courage. Those are all my competitors however, so if I can feel the distance between us, I might feel very despondent.

In any case--

I won't be able to experience such a feeling in my life again.

Back to the end of year party.

As I said a while back, the editorial branch would pay and book a room in a luxurious hotel for me. I would first proceed with the check-in, put my luggage, and then head to the place.

Then, I met the illustrator. As I said, we were shaking in a corner like a borrowed cat, only to have the editor-in-charge grab us by our necks.

After we did our introductions and chatted with the senior authors, I realized that everyone was very cordial.

Those that knew that I debuted at 16 would continue talking about this. Those that did not know would be rather surprised.

The first end of year party I had in my life ended in greetings and tensions. On a side note, i did not win any prizes in the lucky draw.

The Dengeki Bunko End of Year party would have a first meeting and a second meeting. The whole thing starts from 6pm, and ends at 10pm.

There would be pamphlets for a 'third meeting' distributed in the venue, which some authors and illustrators would attend.

This activity was not organized by the editorial branch, but by the authors themselves.

The participants would ride a bus or taxi to a place a little distant, and have it at a KTV place. It would start from 11pm, and if anyone stayed on, it would last until the morning.

I was interested in it, but I still had reservations participating as a 16 year old. It was a pity, but I gave up on it.

So the alternative was that I decided to head to the hotel cafe for tea with the illustrator.

"J-just the two of you?"

"Uh? Yeah. There were a lot of people who couldn't make it to the third meeting, so a few authors and illustrators came to the same cafe as us...we were the only two at our table."

"A-and...then? Wh-what did you talk about? Please tell me in detail!"

Nitadori seemed exceptionally enthusiastic when the topic was about the illustrator. I said a lot, so I guess I had no choice in the matter.

"We had been talking about the characters in 'Vice Versa'. Serious topics, I'll say. I mentioned the image of the characters that would appear later on, and the illustrator drew on her sketchbook..."

"Phew."

Nitadori was (or appeared to be) relieved. I did not know why she was relaxed at all, but it was pointless for me to talk about it, so I continued,

"Well, the illustrator had to take the last bus ride back home, so we bade farewell. I went back to enjoy the luxurious hotel, and the next day, after a visit to Akihabara, I returned home."

There was something I did not tell Nitadori. Or rather, I could not possibly tell her--

Back then, the illustrator was passionately talking about 'BL'

BL was an acronym for many things, but over here, it refers to 'Boys' Love'.

I don't fully understand what 'Boys' Love' is about--but I guess it refers to a genre that describes 'love between boys'.

There are many kinds of BL works, including manga, novels and games. I also heard that doujinshis of pairing beloved male characters together and 'fostering their love' further were very popular.

My illustrator really loves BL. Well, you can tell from her doujins that she draws those kinds of things, and she continues to draw such things even now.

Also, she really loves Shin and Sin. Her eyes were blazing as she rattled on about this topic in front of the author without restraint, saying that she's really elated to be able to draw them.

It's rare in light novels to see covers with only male characters. It appeared that she's very enthusiastic to be able to draw such covers.

"But I can't draw doujins of Shin and Sin now. It's so sad..."

It was said that the editor-in-charge warned her sternly when they first met.

"Looks like I can only buy them. This is so sad..."

I heard that as long as there's doujinshi of 'Vice Versa', she would desperately ask her acquaintances to buy them for her. Apparently, she would pray to the stars, hoping for the actual

work to be popular, to increase in reputation, and result in an increase in doujins. Recently, I also heard that she was dancing in joy when she heard news of an upcoming anime.

"Even if my arms are snapped, I'm going to draw them with my mouth! Please keep writing!"

Well, she's requesting me because of such reasons.

To be honest, I don't understand that realm. She was really scary when she was passionately talking about BL--

But there was no doubt that she really had 'love' for the work, and was able to finish it in an outstanding manner.

"Of course, I attended the Dengeki end of year party last year."

I couldn't say the real identity of the illustrator, but I talked about what happened the previous year to Nitadori.

Same as before, I went to the end of year party in Tokyo, stayed there, and returned home.

"Last year, the illustrator and I went to the third meeting together. That had something to with me taking a break from school back then, and I personally felt that it was fine for me to stay out until morning. I had fun."

That was 5 months back. There were a lot of things that left quite a deep impression on me, so I really remembered them well.

The first and second parties were the same, and this time, I did not win anything in the lucky draw.

The difference was that for the first time, I met the authors who debuted the previous year.

Of course, everyone else was older than me, but as an author, experience wise, I was of an earlier batch. There were some who read 'Vice Versa' before they won awards. They were all shocked to know of my age.

And then, when I participated in the third party--

It was really messy, and at the same time, interesting.

The location was a wide dining room in a massive karaoke room.

The senior authors led the rest by dividing into different groups, and we took the bus to the location. Some also took the taxi there.

There were approximately 50 authors and illustrators who took part, and it was a blast.

At first, everyone would introduce themselves and say a few words, and the organizers would collect the entry fee, and toast to everyone. The editorial branch prepared namecards during the first party, so at the third one, everyone continued to use the same one. If not, we wouldn't be sure who was who.

Those that wanted to go sing would visit the karaoke room, while those who wanted to talk could continue to talk there.

I waited in the dining room until the first bus arrived, so I spent quite a long time with a few senior authors.

I talked a lot about being an author, and I heard--a lot of gossip I really shouldn't mention here.

On a side note, a few authors appeared to have assumed that I was a female before the end of year party last year.

Also, only my age was revealed, so a few of them thought of me to be some 'pretty high school girl author' or something. Where did the 'pretty high school girl' come from?

I learned of the experiences of the other authors, the details they did not divulge in their personal information.

Everyone had different experiences. We're all professional authors, but some were of the working class, some debuted in college, some graduated successfully, some chose to drop out, some had to write and hide this fact from their company (so they could not appear in public at all), and some were public servants who worked after having been granted approval from their superiors.

I was moved. Authors too had their means to survive.

And so, I honestly said that everyone had unique experiences.

"You have a unique experience yourself too!"

Everyone retorted.

I'll explain beforehand that 'those things I heard from the other authors' and told Nitadori afterward were basically all from the conversations back then.

At the third party, not all would be here to chat. Some would have a toast, and then head to the karaoke room, never to return.

It seemed that they would start singing from 11pm or so, until past 7am the next day. How much do they like to sing?

Some authors too would toast, and after that was done, bring out their game consoles to play a monster hunting game or something. They were yelling happily, giving serious looks as they pursued the enemies.

I found a few authors gathered around the dining table, distributing cards. They then lowered their heads suddenly, closed their eyes, and patted their thigh with one hand.

I was surprised, and wanted to ask if there was a strange ritual about to begin. Only then did I realize that it's a card game where the participants are to determine who's not the alien amongst them.

All I knew was the name of the game. Patting the thighs consecutively was to bluff the other players by masking the sounds when raising hands.

We could stay until morning, or not to do so.

Including my illustrator, a few of them took the last ride home. Those that came from afar gathered in droves and took a taxi back to the hotel. They would then hand over their namecards to the organizers.

I got along with a certain senior author I met at the editorial branch, so I participated in all kinds of conversations, getting to know more authors and illustrators.

At midnight, everyone was feeling hungry, since the dinner from the first two parties was long over.

And on the tables,

"Right, let's eat something!"

There would be large plates of food and sweets served, along with juices and alcohol for anyone to drink to their hearts content. (Even so, there won't be any situations of a savage drunkard looking for trouble, or anyone coercing a non drinker to drink).

After 3am or so, a certain author was completely drunk and collapsed on the sofa, sleeping blissfully.

And another author saw this, giving a serious look, saying,

"Hey...you got to be kidding...he's just...sleeping."

Another author said,

"He'll murder his characters in his work without mercy. Only when he's sleeping does his face look like an angel's."

"Yeah...don't write the word 'meat' on his forehead? Don't do it, okay? Don't do it."

"We won't. Aren't we authors? If we want to write, we'll write novels."

"You're right. Anyone brought a pen?"

"Are you going to write?"

"Writing on the body...I think I'll write a really short prose, maybe? Everyone, let's work together."

"So the ending is that the editor says 'Well written, let's submit this draft', and whisk that guy away?"

"No--we'll just forget to write on the ears and spare them."

"Then it should be the other way around."

In fact, for precaution sake, nobody wrote anything.

I took the first bus back to the hotel. Of course, this was the first time I took the first Tokyo bus ride on a Saturday.

Once I got back to the hotel, I spent till it was past 11am. I quickly had a shower, checked out at noon, and left the hotel.

Having heard everything, Nitadori sounded amazed, saying,

"It seems like you enjoyed yourself a lot..."

She really seemed envious.

"I really did. I'm looking forward to the end of year party this year too. Those that debuted this February will probably be participating too."

"By then, you'll be 'an author with an animated work'."

"Ah, well...that kind of gathering isn't discriminated based on age and experience. The authors with animated works aren't those that would put up a front."

At the very least, I felt that nobody would act boastful in front of everyone. Looking at the current phase, it's a little delusional of me, but I hope to become that kind of person.

The train continued to rush forward in the rain.

This track would often pass by mountainous areas and tunnels, so if the rain was too big, it would stop to avoid any potential rockslides--currently, there was no problem or error to be seen.

I had a look at the watch; there was still an hour to the terminal.

I told Nitadori that there was still enough time to answer some questions.

"Then--please talk about the animation."

Nitadori chose this question out of her notebook, probably to add on from what we were talking about. She then continued,

"Being an author is already a rare thing, but I guess an author whose works are made into an anime is rarer, right?"

"Well..I guess."

It's not an uncommon sight recently for light novels to be adapted into an anime. Even so, for all the light novel authors, such authors were a minority.

"So please state everything that happened, from when you learned that an anime was to be made till this point. Ah, before that...for an author, how important is it for his work to be animated?"

I feel that for a light novel author, it is a dream to have one's work adapted into an anime.

First off, I'll simply be delighted that my work is adapted into a video. It's impossible not to be happy about seeing my own created characters being able to move and talk.

Speaking of which, I have the feeling that light novel authors aren't the type that would hate anime, had no interest in it, or never did watch a single one (there are always exceptions, so I can't be sure).

Also, the work's popularity would surge instantly because of an anime airing, boosting the sales of the books. This obviously will cause the author to be delighted.

Once it is decided to be animated, what 'benefit' is there to an author?

I shall summarize what I heard from the senior authors.

"First off, the published works will be reprinted at an unprecedented rate, and they'll be attached with 'anime confirmed'! book collars."

Nitadori nodded.

"I see. The sales volume will create, right?"

Yep. In the anime shops, they'll be placed under the 'to be animated corner'. Ah, placed here would mean that the book covers will be shown up. The cover illustrations would leave a deep impression, and it'll be a big boost for the light novel sales."

"There'll be an increase in the number of new readers, right?"

"Yeah. Also, once the anime airs, there'll be a massive reprint if it becomes a hot topic. The original work itself has to sell well, but even so, it seems that those who know of the work through the anime is far more than the original readers. The print volume can increase by 2, 3

times...I heard that if the anime is a runaway success, the sales volume of the original work will skyrocket further."

"That's amazing!"

"What I said is the dazzling advantages to it though...of course, I heard of the disadvantages."

"Oh?...what are they?"

First off, the workload required would increase drastically.

There would be script and setting checks right from the beginning, and then there's a need to watch the After Records, a need to attend some events sometimes, and also, create a special edition noel that is bundled with the DVD or a similar kind of media.

The publisher wants to make sure the volumes are released along with the airing of the anime, so the author has to write new volumes in the meantime, which means the actual workload would increase so much, it can be rather suffocating.

"Of course, I do find it interesting at times, and I feel that some authors won't feel troubled by it. What's more scary for an author is..."

"'Scared of', as in?"

"I heard that there are cases of the anime ending without being highly discussed."

I watched all kinds of anime, so I understood.

As for what kind of anime would be famous, runaway success, or not at all--

Nobody would know until the results were out (the official airing).

For example, even if an outstanding production team and famous voice actors are gathered, and massive promotions are made, there is no guarantee that it would be popular once it aired.

The anime that was adapted from my own novel might end up buried amongst the many anime aired every season without showing much of a success. I would say that most anime would be of such a case.

When the anime adaptation of the light novel an author writes isn't popular, and when the DVD and BD sales are low, it's hard to hope for a massive leap in print volume.

But this was still okay.

"The most worrying is when...an anime is complete just like this, the popularity will decline--this is what they call 'Owakon'."

I noted with a tragic tone.

Nitadori tilted her head, asking,

"What is 'Owakon'?"

"Well, it is a shortened form of 'Owatta Contents', which basically means 'Content that is over'. It means something that's no longer popular, that nobody actually paid attention to. It seems it was used as an internet lingo, and for those in the authorship industry, it's a vexing term, to say the least."

"I see...so, well...it's not a nice thing to say, but for an author, making an anime is a massive 'gamble', right?"

I nodded firmly.

I heard the same thing from the other authors. Now that I'm in this situation myself, I too felt the same.

Once the anime gets popular, the work would increase, and the harvest would return massively, so much that it's enough for anyone to not think of the increased workload as anything much.

But if it doesn't--

"Thus, an author can choose not to put in bets at all. In other words, a decision to refuse making 'an anime'. This is an important series I'm making, so rather than being an anime that's not popular like many, I might as well reject it outright."

"Really...I guess such people do exist, right?"

"I do hear of such people too, but I don't know who they are. However..."

"However?"

"That's undoubtedly the minority."

I too was jumping up in joy when I heard news of an anime.

Of course, after all kinds of investigations, and having heard of many things, I understood very well that it was a kind of betting.

But even so, I decided to call.

"Hm, good job!"

The one beside me now praised me.

"Th-thanks."

"Thanks to you, I'm able to look forward to working like this!"

"Ahaha, now that you mention it, that's the case."

"And now I heard some really precious things from you, sensei! Now then, please explain everything that's to be done after agreeing to make an anime--when did the anime news come, and how did they reach you?"

When does an author know of an anime to be made, and how? I don't really understand how it goes normally. I'm starting to wonder if there's a fixed format to this myself.

As I said before, I heard of this news last March. In other words, 1 year and 4 months before the official airing.

On a certain Friday in March, I was summoned to the editorial branch.

There was no other meeting to be held, and no need to revise through the draft, so I was worried, wondering what it was about as I went to the editorial branch. After I got there, the editor-in-charge said,

"We received a proposal to adapt 'Vice Versa' into an anime."

And then, as I said, I gave the okay.

A week later, on a certain day.

I went back to Tokyo, and in the editorial branch, I met the people who would take care of me for the first time. Currently, I do feel taken care of.

On a side note, it was snowing on that day.

I felt that there would be an incident as long as there was a huge snowfall in Tokyo, like the '47 Ronin', 'Sakuradamon Incident', and 'February 26 Incident'.

Of course, this was a coincidence, but I was feeling uneasy yet hopeful when I went to the editorial branch--

I nearly slipped at the entrance. The tiles there were slippery when wet.

There were three men discussing with the editor-in-charge in the editorial branch.

They were the producer in charge of planning, the supervisor (tentative at that time) who was in charge of anime production back then, and the writer in charge of series composition who decided upon the framework of the series.

Everyone is older than I am, and they produced many anime work I am familiar with. I was very nervous.

And it seemed they were surprised when they met me for the first time.

The discussion during this meeting was on how to produce 'Vice Versa' as an anime.

The length of the anime was decided by the number of episodes, and also, the number of cours that was indicated by seasons.

Each cour is a quarter of the year, in other words, 3 months. When an anime airs for a cour, the number of episodes would be from 12 to 13. If there is a need to air 2 cours, the number of episodes will double.

The anime 'Vice Versa' was expected to air for one cour, 13 episodes in total.

The series composition writer told me that the plan was to end the anime at the second volume.

In other words--

First half would be Side Shin.

The second half would be Side Sin.

"After hearing that plan...I was really, really happy about it!"

I expressed my excitement.

"Why?"

"That's because if they could convey a volume of work in 6-7 episodes, there is no need to rush."

"How do?"

"Till this point, I've seen a few light novels adapted into anime...anyone who watched the original work would have a feeling that 'yeah, the anime's running too fast'."

It appears that I'm not the only one with such thoughts; it's said that the other authors had similar thoughts. Some would feel that the anime was too rushed, and in contrast, some would say that they're lucky their work was slowly and carefully made. Of course, I can't say who they are.

"In other words...there are many plot points that will be omitted in the anime?"

"Right. I do often feel that 'the plot's moving too fast'. I found that there were many unique interludes in the original work, but they were all cut out. Of course, I can understand that in terms of production, it was something that had to be done...even so, I felt that the progress was too fast. Too quick to digest."

Of course, I felt that the production team would argue back.

"That's not compression, that's distillation."

Or,

"Tempo is the most important thing in an anime. Without plot progression in a show, the viewers will be sick of it."

And the authors would be speechless.

I did not know which side was better.

But when I heard that the anime 'Vice Versa' would be carefully made till the second volume of the original work, I was really happy.

Of course, they asked me the planned release schedule.

The editor-in-charge had decided that the fourth volume would be released in April, and the fifth to be released in June.

After that, we didn't know--

And the producer said,

"Currently, it is hard for us to say, but as long as the anime becomes a hit, we'll naturally consider making a second season, or a 'second cour'. We hope that the original work will continue to sell well, for with more copies so, we can think of the second cour as a two season production."

Bam.

"What's that sound?"

Nitadori tilted her head.

"That's...the sound of the 'switch to quit high school' in my mind."

"You can't do that! --speaking of which, you never did."

"Well yeah...as history proved."

"Ahaha!"

The changes in Nitadori's facial expression was really interesting.

"Men will tell the truth from the background."

"Ahaha!"

After that, it's as what everyone knew.

I had a discussion with my mom and the editor-in-charge, and decided to take leave from school.

From the middle of March onwards, I was able to make use of entire days, and I began to write the continuation of 'Vice Versa' enthusiastically. In fact, at this time, the plans for an anime might go bust.

"Really?"

"It's said that plans for an anime often stall. Reason wise, if it's not because an author is suddenly angered and rejected it, or that it's an issue on the production side...I'm not too sure on the details myself."

"But the anime 'Vice Versa' is already made to such an extent."

Nitadori smile, saying this

"I'm really...glad. I heard that if there's something major that shocked society, an anime that would remind people of that particular incident would be delayed...but I guess 'Vice Versa' is fine."

"There's probably no one in reality who visited another world anyway--now then, next question. How much assistance have you provided for the anime production till this point?"

How much does an author need to assist when participating in the anime production? I feel that this question will depend on the work and the author.

For participation, it can be classified as two ways,

"Do the bare minimum of checks."

"Help as much as my time allows."

I chose the latter.

I had a lot of time due to my leave from school, and the writing of the continuation was going well, so chose to do that.

Most of the animation companies seemed to be located in Tokyo.

It was said that currently, anime is made digitally, and the data can be exchanged through the computers, so the company need not necessarily be in Tokyo. But even so, many companies were located there.

Thus, the production meetings of the anime 'Vice Versa' were also held in Tokyo. To attend the script meeting, I did visit their production office that was located somewhere in Tokyo.

As the words implied, the meeting was a discussion on the script.

Everyone read through the original work, and would look through the script written by the main scriptwriter, giving suggestions to improve.

Such meetings would be held once a week, so I would visit Tokyo every week, on the same day. It was around this time, last year when I first went to such a meeting, and I felt nostalgic thinking about it. I don't know how about it goes for the other anime, but I heard that the entire production speed for 'Vice Versa' itself was one of the faster ones.

During the script meeting, what I had to do was to make requests from the viewpoint of an author. However--

"To be honest, there's practically nothing to be picky about."

"That's because...the lines weren't really omitted, right? I checked the script and the original work, and found that the dialogue was hardly cut off. There was a change in scene order though."

"That's right."

As expected of Nitadori, who read through the original work and the script.

"All I did at most was some minor tweaks, like 'a little mistake in the terms' used, and also 'I hope this character won't do this thing, since I'm planning to use this as a foreshadowing in future volumes'. Unlike the original work, the first episode of the anime had the scene of Shin and Sin in a battle against Pluto. This edit was really exciting...and I was really impressed."

"Yeah."

"So I attended all of the script meetings. All I can say is that this is a really precious experience that allowed me to truly experience the talents of the series composition writer, the scriptwriters and the anime producers. I was really looking forward to every single week, and I learned a lot of things too."

"I see--besides that, have you provided assistance in some way?"

"Hm, after checking the script, I need to check the settings and design."



The editor-in-charge would attach pictures in the mail messages, or tell me the download website. Some were character or weapon designs, and some were background design."

I would look through those pictures and check. There were a lot of characters appearing in 'Vice Versa', so the data was massive.

But I was happy.

Shin and the other characters retained the flair of the illustrator, refined into linear art. Also, there are characters who did not appear in any of the illustrations.

"In that case...what happens?"

"Actually, the illustrator would come up with a few sketch images based on my words. Leaving aside the very unimpressive side characters, she drew all the characters that appeared a few times in the story! I'm really grateful!"

"Heh! That's amazing!"

Nitadori's eyes were blazing. I know it's an expression, but in my eyes, the brown eyes beyond the lens were really dazzling with light.

"The illustrator is also in charge of checking the character designs. If there are disagreement in opinions, I guess I'll back off, but we haven't had any disagreements in opinion."

And so, the residents of the world of 'Vice Versa' were dyed vibrantly in a similar artistic flair, refreshed as they entered the world of animation.

Meek in the anime did look really different, and two daggers were added for her design.

The two daggers had an elegant design, like an Athame. The blades had large handguards with lumps over them so that they could be used to beat enemies up and damage them.

They looked pretty, and yet savage, a really amazing design.

"I'll also participate in assisting one of the work 'locahun'. This work is to be done before checking the script, so actually, the order's reversed, sorry."

"Locahun refers to 'Location hunting', right? That's like looking at filming locations for a movie."

"Right. But I heard that it's English localized into japanese."

I learned of this term in the book, so when I asked, Nitadori nodded,

"In English, it is 'location scouting', right?"

"I see..."

The 'scout' here would refer to the 'scout' in 'boys scout'. I checked on it before, so I remembered. It meant 'investigating' or 'inspection'. I felt that rather than 'hunting for a location', 'checking out the location' would be a more appropriate term in conveying the meaning. I think the portmanteau should be 'LocaSca'.

"But the anime won't be using locations that were actually taken, right? Or?"

Nitadori made a valid question. That's basically it, I answered.

"Of course, the anime is different from a live action movie, and we won't necessarily be filming there--"

I heard that recently, a lot of anime productions would head to the location that forms a model, and take a large number of photos and videos. That data would be used mostly for background art. Sometimes, the DVD or BD would have a special video involving those places.

When scouting the location with the producer, directors, art supervisor and the artists, I would lead the way. The setting in 'Side Sin' was directly based on the town and area I lived in.

When writing the light novel, I would change the terminology completely, so the name of the town was completely fictional.

However, there are those that would recognize the place through the various descriptions. Looking at the readers' thoughts on the light novel, some are able to say the correct answer 'this is definitely the place. The reason being...'.

The basis of the high school Shin and Yui studied at was--not the high school I studied at in my first year, but a private high school I could see from the library. I was a middle school student when I first started out as an author after all.

The staff did not enter the school, merely taking pictures of the scenery they could see, of those who were headed to school, and so on. The artists would not follow exactly when they draw the background, but would modify the scenery greatly.

As for how the inside of the school looked in the second volume, I did use my middle school as reference.

In the anime, the layout of the school was similar to the high school I studied in, but my middle school wasn't taken as a reference. It was said that the interior of the high school was simply ordinary.

Shin's house was designated at a certain high class residential area in the same town.

Closest to that place was many beautiful residential houses that were just built up from farm land, and Shin's house was one of them. We went there on a rental minivan, and took photos and videos of that place without disturbing anyone else.

Shin and Yui's houses were located near a park. Even though we went to that area, we couldn't find such houses.

Of course, the ancient castle that is the symbol of my hometown appeared too.

"This castle is great! I'm going to set camp here one day!"

The location where Sin lifted his head to look at the castle and yell that with emotion was established beforehand too. Through videos and photos, we recorded the Tenshu from the position Sin stood at.

"Sensei, please try shouting from there like Sin did."

The director told me, the guide to do so. Just standing there was fine, but I would pass on the shouting. Speaking of which, the difference in height between me and Sin is too great.

The train station we took our rides from would also become a scene in the anime.

There was a description of the platform and the inside of the train in the novel, and of course, there were large posters of female characters from the original story placed on both right and sides of the train carriage. I heard that the production team had obtained permission from the transportation company to do so.

If the anime became a great hit, would there be colored wrappings of Shin and Sin on the trains...? Would a voice actor take over as announcer on the train broadcast? If that became the case, I'll be really happy, but I'll feel awkward when it comes to riding on the train.

"Then! When the anime reaches 'Side Sin'..."

Nitadori noted happily, and I followed up on her words.

"There'll be a lot of scenes that we saw before."

"Wow! I'm really looking forward to it!"

"Something worth being happy about is that once the anime becomes a hit, there'll probably be an increase in number of people going on 'Pilgrimage'."

"'Pilgrimage'?"

"Well...that refers to the fans happily visiting the places where the anime is set."

"Ah, it means visiting the locations? That's such a grand way of calling it!"

This term really is that exaggerated. I guess it's because the religious knowledge the Japanese have is a little weaker, so anywhere can be considered 'Sacred Grounds'. Some might even think 'well, it's not just the Japanese who might feel this way'.

Leaving that aside,

"There's a lot of 'Sacred Ground' all over Japan. The number of visitors will increase because of an anime, and some might use them to develop the towns."

"Then when the anime becomes a hit, will you be appointed as a tourist ambassador and be hailed by the town council, sensei?"

Nitadori asked happily. I never thought of such things before.

The possibility...might not be zero--

"If that's the case, I'll definitely refuse...I'm going to escape, even if it means moving houses..."

"Eh--that's a pity!"

No no, not at all.

"Instead of me..how about you be it, Nitadori?"

"Eh? What do I do?"

Looks like Nitadori's a no go too.

Back then, besides sleeping, I was checking on the anime and related information, writing future volumes without stopping.

From Summer to Autumn last year, as far as I remembered, I hardly went out, besides heading to Tokyo.

Since I was basically cooking for myself, I could do some simple dishes, so at most, I merely went to the nearby supermarkets for ingredients, or cycle to the shopping mall that was slightly further (there is a bookshop inside too).

Maybe the people living nearby would gossip,

"There's a tall son living in that house, right? If he's not going to school, I wonder what he's doing...?"

"That's a 'shut-in' that's common nowadays, right? That's disgusting. I hope he doesn't start killing animals or something."

Or have similar discussions. (But it's just my delusion, I guess)

"Actually, I did kill..."

"Ehh!"

"Shin and Sin in the story."

"What the...that shocked me..."

"Sorry."

The assistance work in producing the anime included attending script meetings, LocaHun, and design checks.

"Speaking of which, how are we going to handle the image content checks?"

The editor-in-charge asked me when I was done with the above described work.

That referred to the grids that explained how the produced visuals would be displayed through illustrations and script. Basically, the images would be aligned vertically, and there would be the explanation and timeframe designated on the right side. It is commonly known as storyboard.

This storyboard can be said to be the layout of the anime scenes and actions. The pictures would be drawn based on the storyboard.

"I don't think I'll reject any of it, but I want to have a look."

I answered. As there time was constrained, the editor-in-charge agreed on the condition that I had to 'reply immediately'.

I was really happy seeing the storyboard the director drew in data format.

Just being able to see a real storyboard alone was exhilarating for me, but there was no way I couldn't be delighted with the storyboard having my own work drawn on it.

Starting from Shin, Sin, Pluto, Meek to the other characters, it was amazing how they could move like this, and thinking about it

The only nitpick I had was that a certain warrior's master hand was often mistaken.

During the process of the anime production, the storyboard would be made into a layout, and then made into an anime. There was nothing left for me to check, so I suppose this would be the end of the explanation.

"Would you pick the voice actors...or visit the auditions, sensei?"

Nitadori asked, sounding a little terrified,

Hearing her say this, I believe such situations do occur. I answered.

"No, I didn't. When the editor-in-charge asked me what I intended to do, I stopped at that point. I like anime, and I have beloved voice actors--but I feel that I'm unable to choose someone appropriate."

"I see...so you never nominated for anyone you hoped to voice?"

An actor say indicate his hopes to some extent, and voice out the impressions he hopes to have from some people. I was asked on that matter too, but--

"I gave no opinion at all. This is the only part where I feel that I can trust the director and sound supervisor. It would be better for them to have full authority."

"So...when you visited the After Record yourself, what did you feel...?"

Nitadori's involved in this, so she sounded a little pessimistic as she asked that.

"Those who believe shall be saved."

I answered clearly.

And then, I saw Nitadori smile.

I did reject another work too.

That's composing lyrics.

The company would create image songs for the anime characters to sing, character songs. They would seek my agreement, and of course, I agreed immediately.

Once a certain script meeting was done, the producer asked me,

"Sensei, are you willing to compose lyrics for the character songs?"

And then,

"If you want to do so, you can."

The editor-in-charge answered.

And then,

"No, I'm not doing it! I can write novels, but not lyrics!"

I answered immediately.

"I see. Well, we have no choice. Guess we shall give up on producing character image songs. However, what about the ending?"

"Erm...has the difficulty increased?"

I rejected the proposal to compose lyrics for the Opening (OP) and Ending (E).

As for the OP and ED for the 'Vice Versa' anime--

The titles and singers were announced.

The one in charge of singing the OP is a veteran female singer who sang many OP anime songs, or anisongs for short.

Of course, i knew about her; I did buy a few CDs from her. When I heard that she could possibly be singing for this anime, I was shivering in excitement. I heard that there's a chance for me to meet her, so I thought that when I get to do so, I'll have a CD for her to sign on.

The one singing the ED is the voice actress of Emma. She has an amazing talent in singing too, and her identity as a singer might be more famous than her identity a voice actor. She did sing all kinds of songs, including Anisongs and other songs.

These two songs are great. When I first heard them, I was so moved I was about to cry.

"Eh! --You heard them! Do you...have them with you?"

I saw that Nitadori had a strong reaction.

"Ah, it may be a secret...but I have the data with me...don't tell anyone that I have them."

I shrank back as I said.

"Got it...how nice..."

"Well...this is my right as an author."

"How nice..."

Nitadori gave me a really spiteful look, and as I looked back at her,

"The songs are in my laptop..."

I said something I shouldn't have.

"Oho!"

The brown eyes under Nitadori's glasses glowed. Right, they're really glowing.

"Ah, no...that was a lie. Nothing...at all."

Nitadori in turn,

"..."

Glared at me from beyond the glasses. I turned my face to the window that was washed by the rain.

"Hey...sensei...just a little question..."

I never thought that Nitadori would let out such a scary voice. That's to be expected of a voice actress, I guess. I was really scared, and my back shivered slightly.

"W-what is it...?"

Nitadori then reverted to her usual voice, grinning as she said,

"There's a trillion Yen at the basin."

"It multiplied by ten!?"

"If you want it, now's the time."

"No, it's fine...I can survive on the money I earn..."

"I see...that's impressively..."

"That's how it is."

"I won't be touching your laptop so carelessly, sensei."

"That's because...there's a password, I can't do that."

"I won't be touching your laptop so carelessly, sensei."

"Well, I say."

"I won't be touching your laptop so carelessly, sensei."

"....."

Nitadori's a voice actress. It's fine to think of her as someone related to the anime. Or I should say, since she's involved, she knows of my secret which only a few people know of. I feel that she's determined, and she kept interrogating me, so I'm helpless. It's raining today, no other passengers on board, and there's still power in the laptop. It's great if her hearing the OP and ED will get her more into the role of Meek.

While Nitadori inserted her earphones into my laptop and heard the music, I began to think of many excuses.

"Amazing...I'm moved."

Once she heard the ending theme, Nitadori removed the two earphones, saying that.

Was it my imagination? Her eyes seemed to be a little teary.

I guess I probably showed a similar expression back then.

I slipped my laptop back into my backpack, and looked at the watch.

There was another 10 minutes until the terminal.

The rain was strong, and the train continued to race on, as if saying *I won't lose to this*. Looking at this, I guess the train should arrive at the terminal on time.

I did not put my backpack on the rack, but at my feet.

"Eh, sensei."

I heard this call, and turned to the right, seeing Nitadori give a serious smile.

"This will be the last question of the day--how will the original plot of 'Vice Versa' carry on in the future?"

This question was obviously different from the questions about the authors I answered before. Or I should say, she's basically begging me to spoil the plot for her.

Her expression differed from usual, probably because she understood that well. Her face was stiff, and she bit her lips.

I know the feeling of wanting to know the later plot of a story. I too would feel frustrated whenever I'm done with the latest volume of a series I'm following.

Based on my imagination, I'm getting that she wants to know more of what happened to Meek.

"How is it?"

Again, she asked.

At this moment, I thought of 2 things.

First, Nitadori's pretty face was too close to me, so close that I'm almost unable to hold myself back.

Second, my back's leaning against the wall, so if I want to run, I can only break the glass, but I don't have that much strength.

Third, I told Nitadori so much till this point, and even played the opening and ending themes to her. In that case, I guess it's fine to tell her, right?

Let me correct myself. It should be three things. Well, the first two can be combined to one.

My heart faltered for an instant,

"That's--"

And I immediately corrected myself.

Even if it's Nitadori, I can't answer this question. I said,

"I can't answer it now. I hope that you'll read the book once it's published."

Since now that we're talking about plot in the future, we can't possibly not mention Meek.

Nitadori's probably shocked, and maybe depressed.

Of course, as an author, I write for the sake of shocking the readers. I hope that the readers will be really shocked by the developments, that they'll lament.

However, I still hope that the readers would feel shocked after they read the story.

Right, now, I shouldn't be revealing the future plot.

"I see..."

Nitadori answered, probably because she was somewhat mentally prepared.

"I guess it was impossible...to ask for such an unreasonable request. Sorry."

The sealed lips curled up slightly.

That anguished smile caused me to recall of Meek whom Shin met for the first time--

I felt that for a moment, my consciousness was dragged to Reputation.

The train continued to move on in the city.

We'll arrive at the terminal soon. It was raining outside.

I decided to make a trip to the toilet before we arrived. There was still some time. The toilets at the station were normally packed, and the ones on the train was more comfortable.

I had Nitadori get up to leave the seat, and moved to the aisle. I would soon return to my seat before I arrived at the station, so i did not take away the backpack by my feet.

I slipped through the automatic doors at the back of the car.

I finished washing my hands at the basin next to the toilet, put my handkerchief back into my pocket, and quickly went back to the corridor.

At this moment, I was about to knock into someone.

There wasn't usually anyone around, so I didn't pay attention at all. I was taken aback when I saw a shadow appear in the corner of my eye, and hurriedly turned aside--

Only to know into that person.

I didn't know how urgent that person was, probably ran here. I couldn't dodge, and was knocked down really hard.

I really lost balance, my waist falling directly onto the corridor. It hit the floor, and my back hit the wall, causing me to fall with limbs in the air, so it really hurt. Luckily, I didn't hit my head as I immediately pulled my chin back in.

After I fell, I thought.

It's really my fault for not looking around before I walked out, but the person I knocked into didn't have to be that anxious. Didn't the teacher say not to run on the corridor?

Whose fault is it anyway?

But I guess I should apologize first.

Since I should be the one with a bigger body.

Or I should be asking, is that person alright after knocking into me?

Even I was taken aback, so there's probably no way that person should be completely unscathed.

Is that person hurt?

If there's a fracture or an injury, how do I compensate?

What if it's a doctor with a high yearly salary?

What if it's a lady who's about to give birth?

While I was wildly thinking about the worst case scenarios--

The ceiling I could see was covered by a black figure, and I was strangled.

It was Nitadori.

Chapter 7 - Time to Play

I'm a High School Boy and a Bestselling Light Novel author, strangled by my female classmate who is my junior and a voice actress.

This is my current predicament.

Nitadori, who knocked into me--

Was crouched on me, with my limbs in the air--

Choking my neck.

And still continuing to choke.

I can vividly remember everything that had happened till this point--

But in the end, I still have no idea why Nitadori wanted to kill me.

Why's so Nitadori desperate?

Why did Nitadori become so desperate out of a sudden?

Well, if I don't know, I guess anything's fine.

Because of that, I gave up on searching for the answer.

More importantly, let's think about other things with the little bit of remaining time I have left.

If I die here, what will happen?

If I'm to bid farewell to this world in this comforting shaking, what will unfold?

All sorts of thoughts became quick electronic signals that twirled about in my pitch black mind.

The answer easily appeared in my mind.

First off, 'Vice Versa' would end at the eleventh volume's draft that was completed.

I won't be able to convey the ideas I thought of, like Shin's future, the secrets of Reputation that were related to such, the world viewpoint that was created.

In other words, there is no ending to this work.

The readers might be feeling pissed at how the work ends, and I'm really sorry about that.

But for me--

It's not that bad thinking about how I managed to create the first novel in my last year of middle school, and have it last until the eleventh volume. Of course, this isn't a good thing either.

An author's death before an anime airing would probably cause much discussion.

Before it airs, there might be words like 'this is dedicated to the original author, who died prematurely.'

I really want to see what kind of visuals would go with that OP theme, but well, I guess I got no say in this.

What will mom think about this?

I don't know.

This is the one thing I don't know.

And I won't be able to know.

Which year was I born in?

How many years passed after that?

I definitely lived for more than 10 years.

It's a long time. A lot of things happened.

I read a lot of books.

I worked hard to become an author.

I even became an author.

My books sold well.

I have a good life.

I'm really happy.

What I'll really miss is--

Miss is--

Huh?

Wait a moment.

Just in case, if I'm to die here--

Will Eri Nitadori be taken for a murderer?

Nitadori will probably be able to escape, I guess?

But the Japanese police are pretty good, so I guess she'll be caught quickly.

Will she be convicted for homicide?

Isn't that really bad?

Won't this really cause her much trouble?

What about the After Record tomorrow?

Who's going to take over as Meek?

No, more importantly than that--

What'll happen to the 16 year old Nitadori?

Ah, no good.

This isn't good.

I can't die here.

Let me correct myself.

I don't care when exactly I'll die--

But I can't die here now.

Absolutely not.

I must stop her.

I must stop Nitadori.

No matter what.

My mind began to move.

How's my body now?

Can I still move?

No, got to move.

Move it.

My hands--

Reacted to my weak will.

I slowly lift my hands. In fact, I might have moved very fast, but the actions I saw were very slow.

My right hand moved faster, by about 30cm. My left hand continues to rise lazily, currently 10cm away from the floor.

My right hand grabs the long, pretty black hair dangling from Nitadori's head.

In fact, I wanted to grab her arm or body, but even so, it didn't matter.

According to what the books record, human hair is very firm. If I'm to grab a large handful of hair and tug at it, her body will probably lose balance.

It's a terrible act to pull a girl's hair.

As a male, this is the worst action possible. I shouldn't do this after all.

But just this once, please forgive me.

I'll apologize to Nitadori later, so please forgive me.

I command my right arm to 'pull'.

I know that the electronic signals were flickering in my pitch dark mind, flowing through.

The arm's willing to listening to my command. I tug hard at Nitadori's hair--

Something slipped off.

The hair falls from Nitadori's head.

The long, black hair falls completely from Nitadori's head.

And while the hair's being pulled down, the black hair covering the head shakes, lifting up the other end of the hand.

My right arm let out a loud thud, hitting the floor.

In other words, my arm reached the lowest possible position.

As I am still holding onto the hair, Nitadori's black hair fell off, and landed on my fist, arm and right flank.

Did I just pull off Nitadori's hair along with her scalp!?

Such delusions entered my mind.

I imagined Nitadori giving off a blood curdling scream as blood splattered from her head, and was about to let out a voiceless shout of shock.

At the next moment, I saw it.

On the head where Nitadori lost her hair, within my vision that was suddenly brightened, something seemed to flying from the center to the right.

I merely saw it for just an instant, but I know very well what it was.

It's a net. A thin black net, draped upon Nitadori's head

The black hair fell after it was pulled, and the net slipped off. The net then flung off like a rubberband, vanishing from my sights.

Gently--

Nitadori's hair flutters.

It's not the black hair that falls upon me. I know very well that the black hair is a wig.

What's left on Nitadori's head is her real hair.

It's held down firmly by the wig, but now that it's unraveled, the hair falls towards me due to gravity.

The hair color is a light brown, close to grey; short hair that isn't enough to cover the face.



Her fringe touches my left hand, dropping towards the left hand that manages to rise to the height of the right hand, albeit later.

The left arm rises later than the right arm, but it's now higher than the latter.

Even I'm not sure as to what I'm doing.

My left hand approaches Nitadori's face, like a biological creature that won't obey my instructions.

I pat it down.

My hand brushes from Nitadori's right side to the left side.

I did not hit her face, but from her temples to the top of her eyes.

To my eyes, all the actions appeared so slow, so the left hand seemed to caress past the face so fluidly.

But in fact, that might have been a fast slap.

I pulled at a girl's hair, and gave her a lashing...

Ah, I'm really a terrible guy for committing such atrocities one after another.

But it's too late.

I knocked Nitadori down.

The glasses I usually see on Nitadori, the glasses with the lens soaked with tears--

Dropped to my right.

He heard the glasses land far away, and within my vision, my left hand had reached the right.

Nitadori's tears too flew slowly at the instant.

The tears slowly progressed in the air, dripping on my face and nose bridge.

I then saw Nitadori's eyes, and the pupils in those eyes.

There were three of those pupils.

There's no doubt that there were 3 pupils.

The pupil in the center of the girl's left eye was brown.

The right eye had a brown pupil, and a faint grey pupil that was hard to discover due to the backlight.

I see three pupils.

They are cuter, as compared to when her hair shifted.

I--

"Even if I'm going to die, I'm able to feel fear in something other than death."

Had such a precious experience.

Who?

Who is she?

I thought the one wanting to kill me is Nitadori.

I see, I understand that I'm about to die here.

However, that'll cause her so much trouble, so I changed my mindset, wanting to stop her.

And after some panic.

In the end--

The one strangling me is someone else.

Who?

Who is this person?

Who's this person with short brown hair and 3 pupils?

An alien?

In that case, which planet did she come from?

How did she arrive?

Speaking of which--

Does she understand Japanese?

No, that's not it.

Calm down.

She's not an alien.

She's Eri Nitadori, not anybody else.

The long black hair is a wig, her real hair is light brown, and--

Her color contact lense is shifted.

There were two pupils in Nitadori's right eye, and the dark brown pupil is shifted far to the left side. The center of the pupil became white, so I know.

The color contact is meant to hide the color of her right. Her actual pupil color is a light grey--or to be precise, she has a 'grey iris'.

Is the left eye the same?

I tried my best to gather my consciousness, but it did not seem to be the same. If she was wearing contacts, there should be a clear line there.

If that's the case--

If the right eye is the one with the color contact lense--

All sort of thoughts quickly flowed through my head, swirling along with the final lights before that.

I know of such a person.

I know of some who's born with heterochromia.

I read a letter from someone who's born with heterochromia.

The backpack left at my seat.

The draft of the eleventh volume that's left inside.

I see.

So that's how it is.

Ahh, I get it.

I get--

The final lights gave me a hint after all.

I'm being choked on the neck.

In other words, Nitadori's holding down the sides of my carotid arteries--

And less than 10 seconds passed.

However, my mind's about to reach its limit.

The scenery in front of me suddenly got down.

My mind, working so hard until the very end, is starting to lose strength.

This isn't good.

I'll be losing consciousness, and I won't be able to see anything.

I know that despite that, humans won't die immediately.

However, I won't be able to stop Nitadori.

If my blood supply continues to remain cut off like this, I won't be able to wake up after a few minutes. I'll probably die for sure.

My head feel very heavy.

Really, I can't see anything in the darkness.

But, somebody--

Please save.

Somebody, please save.

Please save her.

And before I lose consciousness completely.

I can hear a woman's shriek.

Those warm hands,
Just feel so--
So comforting.

When my eyes open--
I see the lights on the ceiling, and police officers in uniform.
I'm not dead yet?

"Hey! You alright?"

The owner of the voice is a middle-aged police officer in uniform. I'm lying face up, and he's standing to my right. The left side's the wall.

I really want to answer that I'm fine.

"I'mmmm..."

I answer. In this situation, I can't say that I'm fine.

But I understand.

I know that I'm about to recover soon. My mind's becoming completely clear.

The pitch black darkness is no longer.

"You alright? Hey!"

Faced with another question,

"I'm fine. I'm awake."

I answer as such,

"Do you know your name?"

"Of course--"

And I say my name.

"Do you know the date today?"

"May 15th, Thursday."

I answer. He never asked me what day is it, but I add on just in case.

"Does your head hurt?"

"No, feels good now."

"Do you feel hurting in your body somewhere?"

"No, it doesn't hurt at all."

"Need an ambulance?"

"No, no need for that. Can I get up now?"

"Please, take it easily though."

I exert strength in my abdomen, and slowly lift my upper body.

Then, I turn my body to the right, and put my feet down. No problems with this action at all.

I look around the room I'm in.

It's about 8 tatamis wide, with the tables, chairs side by side. It appears to be an officer, but it's a little messy. The tables and chairs designs look simple, plain.

I turn my eyes aside, and see simple beds leaning on the wall, forming two Ls.

Of course, I'm on one of the beds, and I can smell the stinging disinfectant. He can hear a slow rumbling of the trains from afar.

I know without asking where I am. It's the sick bay in the station. I'm in it now.

I can see the clock on the wall to my left.

I see the digital display. Less than 2 minutes passed since the Limited Express arrived.

And without asking, I know what happened.

I lost consciousness, but I wasn't choked to death. She probably let go just a few moments afterwards.

The train then reached this station.

I don't know if I'm stretchered here or carried here, but I manage to regain consciousness immediately.

I'm not dead.

Thank goodness.

Really, thank goodness.

Anyway, really, thank goodness. However, there's something more important now.

How's Nitadori doing?

I immediately got my answer. That's because there's a girl with her head lowered, sitting on another bed under the clock.

It's a bright brown short hair. She's looking down, and I can't see her, but from the jeans and the light blue sweater attire, I can tell that it's definitely Nitadori.

She's sobbing.

"Uu...uuu...uuu..."

I can hear a feeble sobbing voice.

There are two women seated beside Nitadori.



They seem to be cuddling Nitadori, and seem to be holding her down, preventing her from running away.

Without any explanation, I know that the one to the left of Nitadori is Miss Conductor. The conductor on the Limited Express we were on.

Then, I start to deduce..

The shriek I hear before I lose consciousness was from her. She's my savior.

Miss Conductor must have arrived at the scene right on time, and tried to stop Nitadori who would have strangled me to death if she kept it up, before notifying the attendant on the platform.

Another woman was seated opposite Miss Conductor, and she too appears to be in her late twenties. She has short, black hair, and is wearing a navy blue suit with pants.

She's touching Nitadori on the back with her right arm, appearing to be comforting the sobbing Nitadori desperately. Nitadori's luggage was placed by her side.

I don't know who she is, but I can deduce. I guess that should be the case.

There's also a middle aged male staffer who's looking perturbed her being dragged into in trouble, and another young police officer who appears to be 20. There are 7 people in this room.

I slowly look around the room, and finally, at the basket beside my bed, looking at the thing inside.

It's my backpack.

The zip that should have been sealed up is open, and I can see my laptop inside. The draft that should have been inside the bag is stuffed messily into my bag.

It's really as I expected.

Everything is as what I thought.

I guess he could tell that I'm being rather nonchalant about it.

"Now then--what happened, exactly?"

The middle aged police officer standing beside me asks me with a gentle yet firm voice.

I see. This is a precious hint. Nitadori hasn't said anything.

For caution sake, I ask back,

"Erm...you haven't heard from her?"

The police officer shakes his head.

"Nope. She's been crying all the time. Of course, once she calms down a little, I intend to question her."

Good.

I feel that I'm a shallow person.

I read a lot of books for a long time, and due to the influence of books, I tried to write a novel, managed to debut successfully, and my work's successful enough to be adapted into an anime. However, I'm just a shallow person who's just that much.

Even so, since I found what I have to do, I should be working hard, aiming for that goal.

No matter how arduous it is, if there's only one way to do that, I should do it courageously.

What I'm going to do next isn't something that allows for failure.

If I ask myself if I'm able to do it, I suppose I probably won't be able to.

If not for this situation, I definitely won't try such a thing, let alone do it.

To be honest, I really want to run away. Run to a hiding place.

Shouldn't I have made that kind of determination?

But if I don't do this, right now--

I won't be able to help Nitadori.

This is the first and last chance.

All I can only do is to go all in now.

And so, I--

While I sit up on the bed--

I shout loudly in my heart.

Time to Play.

I suddenly stand up, causing those looking at me to be taken aback.

There's a mirror hanging on the wall behind me. I already saw the mirror when I was lying down.

So I quickly turn around.

And look at the mirror.

There are some clear long fingerprints on the sides of my throat. Those are the marks left behind by Nitadori, and I guess they won't be gone for quite a while. I feel that her strangling skills aren't great.

I lift my chin, and shake my head around.

"Oh--oh! There are some obvious marks there!"

I declared loudly.

At the same time, Nitadori continued to sob weakly,

"Hii--?"

But she stops the moment she let out this funny voice.

"Erm...what about that?"

The middle aged police officer asked.

I turned my eyes from myself in the mirror to the police officer who's very close to me.

And then, I notice--

That person's eyes are really sharp, like a dagger. To be honest, I'm really scared.

But right now, I don't have the time to be scared.

I inhale.

"There's nothing to say! --erm, I guess I have to say something , right?"

"If you don't, I'll ask her."

"I got it! I'll say! I--told her to strangle me!"

The police officer's eyes are now as sharp as an eagle. It's really scary. I'm sorry for lying, I'm really sorry. But please forgive me for today.

"Why's that?"

The police officer's questioning voice becomes so deep it's really scary. My legs are shaking, my thighs unable to exert strength. I really want to sit down, I really want to run away.

But to hide my shivering, I continue to move my body, making exaggerated actions.

"Because it's a nice feeling to be knocked out by a collar choke."

"Oh...?"

"Do you know judo, Mr Police Officer?"

"I suppose."

"I know a little about 'Yawara'--"

This isn't a lie. I read an entire collection of a girl's judo manga of the same time, Yawara!. That manga's really interesting.

"It's rather comfortable to be almost knocked out when being held down by a collar choke."

"Hm, so?"

"So, I asked her to do that."

"'Her', as in?"

The girl with the ridiculously dyed hair there--my girlfriend."

Nitadori stops sobbing, her head remains lowered,

"Huh!?"

Only to quickly lift it, so fast that her head of hair flutters gently along with it.

The hair's really pretty as it danced, probably because her real hair's thin and light.

I look at Nitadori's face.

She's been crying, so her face is all riddled with tears and snot.

Her scleras are completely red. The iris within the balls are of a different color. The right eye is slightly grey, and the left eye a deep brown.

Anyone can tell that it's obvious heterochromia.

The light brown hair is coupled with the white tender skin and an upright nose bright. Her looks alone would have people doubting if she was Japanese.

My eyes met Nitadori's.

Several minutes ago, our eyes did meet, but the situation now is completely different from before.

Miss Conductor, standing beside Nitadori, is looking at me uneasily, skeptically.

And the woman shielding Nitadori from the other side is looking at me.

She's clearly glaring at me now.

"In other words, you--"

The police officer with eagle eyes says to me.

I turn my sights unwillingly to that terrifying person.

If I have to lie, I have to look at him right in the eyes. I understand this well. Nitadori has been doing this all this while.

"So you're saying that you weren't really killed by that girl?"

I want to run away, but right now, I have to hang on,

"Kill? Ack? What are you saying?"

I feel that my legs are still shaking.

But I can't admit defeat. I can't run away. I can't give up.

Didn't her script tremble a lot once? Didn't she perform better afterwards?

She chanted a spell. Even I can do that.

"Sorry...but why exactly did things turn out as it is?"

"That isn't right? But that Conductor there said she saved you from being killed."

I guess so.

Again, I look over to Miss Conductor.

It'll be great if I can use telepathy now. But I don't have such skill.

Miss Conductor, I'm sorry.

Your judgment was correct.

I was nearly killed by Nitadori.

It's very likely that I would have died if you didn't happen to pass by.

You're my savior.

From this outcome, you saved Nitadori too.

I'll never forget this grace.

I'm so grateful that I'll write a book with you as the protagonist one day.

And then, I'll give half of the publishing fees to you.

But--

Please act as the antagonist now. There's no other choice here.

I'm really, really sorry.

One day in the future, soon after, I hope to tell you the truth.

I'm really sorry.

"What are you saying? That's not it!"

I shout with all my might.

"There wasn't anyone down there, so I thought I just wanted to do a little on the corridor...erm...flirt around a bit! I said that before, right! That the feeling of being strangled is really comfortable! It's just the misunderstanding of Miss Conductor, so she shrieked out loud, then Nitadori exerted strength due to her shock, I thought it was bad, but I got knocked out before I can give up!"

After hearing my words, Miss Conductor's face paled.

"...I-I...ah, no..."

Miss Conductor's face is so pale she stopped what she's saying.

"Erm..."

And then, she's unable to say anything.

It's probably because she's pointed out that she's mistaken, and couldn't give up on that possibility.

Considering the possibilities of 'a girl wanting to strangle a boy' and 'a girl making out with a boy'--

The latter was more probable.

"Speaking of which, I was seated next to her before this. Miss Conductor should know that best. We rode the same ride to Tokyo so many times already!"

I told the police officer, and he turned his sharp stare towards Miss Conductor,

"Hm? Is that so?"

The young police officer and the attendant too look at her.

"Er-erm..."

With everyone watching her, the poor Miss Conductor answers sheepishly,

"I did...see them...together a few times..."

Due to the wig, color contacts and glasses, Nitadori's appearance now differs greatly from before--but because of the similar clothing, Miss Conductor's able to recognize her as Nitadori. She's saved.

"Uu..."

The police officer then continues to think about it--

And then, he asks the woman beside the dumbfounded Nitadori,

"Miss Kamishiro."

"Hm, is anything the matter?"

So she's called Miss Kamishiro. I don't know how the kanji goes, but it does sound cool, matches her sharp, perfect attitude. One day, I'll use that as a character name.

I've already guessed who Miss Kamishiro is, as she continues to answer with a dignified voice.

The police officer asks Miss Kamishiro.

"Do you know him?"

"Yes, kind of..."

Miss Kamishiro notes vaguely.

Now's the time. If there's a chance to interrupt, this is it.

I quickly take a little breath, and start to lie,

"Miss Kamishiro knows about me and her, and keeps it a secret between us! Of course, she probably doesn't like me or anything, I guess!"

The police officer looks at me. Eh? That's why he probably never noticed the stunned look on Miss Kamishiro's face.

"Do you know Miss Kamishiro?"

The police officer said. I replied.

"Of course! She's my girlfriend's bodyguard after all!"

I don't know proof, but I'm guessing that to be the case.

I feel that Nitadori's family is rich, and to watch over their precious daughter, they hired a bodyguard to follow her.

There's enough clues for me to make this guess.

A month back, Nitadori spoke to me for the first time on the train.

Back then, she didn't have any luggage. Ever since the next week however, she brought her luggage along.

Why's that?

I guess that the first time, Nitadori left her luggage to Miss Kamishiro. She'll board the train along with Nitadori, as long as there aren't any other bodyguards around. There's no doubt about this.

Back then, Miss Conductor, who's looking a little pale now (I'm sorry!) didn't say anything, but immediately showed a skeptical look.

I guess that's probably because Nitadori's ticket is the green train carriage or a designated seat.

Then, Nitadori would have Miss Kamishiro sit in another carriage, or a front seat in the same carriage, before sitting beside me alone.

Once we arrive at the terminal, Nitadori will ask me to alight first, and then wait on the train for Miss Kamishiro to pick up her. They'll then head towards the relative's house in Mejiro--I don't know whether it's real or not, but in any case, they'll be heard towards the lodging for that day.

"..."

Miss Kamishiro gives a grim look, thinking about what to say.

Please go along with my words so that we can help Nitadori.

"To be honest--"

Miss Kamishiro speaks up, and the police officer looks at her.

Nitadori, who's been dumbfounded the entire time, turns her head slowly towards her bodyguard.

"I have no idea of Milady's preferences. I do think there is a more suitable boyfriend for her, but well--from my viewpoint, I can't nitpick anything about it.

She went along with it. Miss Kamishiro just went along with my acting.

Thank you! Miss Kamishiro! I won't forget about this kindness!

I shout in my heart.

"But I never imagined that he would ask Milady to do such a thing. This caused such a huge commotion. What do you think about this?"

Miss Kamishiro then proceeds to glare at me.

I'm really sorry. Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry.

"Please don't glare at me! I wasn't the one choking her neck!"

"Of course! If you did that, I would have choked you instead!"

"You're as scary as ever, Miss Kamishiro!"

"Milady asked me to let both of you chat alone on the train at least. I thought that you wouldn't do anything indecent since it's a public place, so I agreed to it unwillingly."

"Ah...erm, understood. No, sorry. I--no, this guy here is reflecting on it."

I nearly let out a humble 'I'. That was close.

"..."

Nitadori remains dumbfounded there, giving a dazed look as she appears to have forgotten how to blink.

This is good. Please don't say anything.

I desperately try to convey this message to Nitadori through telepathy.

It's a sudden action, but I understand you really wanted to kill me.

It's only until the very end did I understand the reason for your actions.

But don't say anything. Please don't say anything.

"Uu..."

The police officer asks Nitadori and me,

"So in other words, this isn't a crime, right? Both of you?"

I immediately answer,

"Of course! But--"

"But?"

I continue to buy some time,

"Well...erm...however...that...well.."

"What is it?"

I couldn't drag on anymore.

"Erm...I'm really sorry for causing such a great commotion that shocked everyone. Especially to Miss Conductor there--I'm really sorry."

I lower my head in apology.

I bend down to give a 90 degrees bow. Actually, I want to get on my knees.

"Ah? Eh? No..."

I can't see Miss Conductor's face, but I can hear her perturbed voice.

I lift my head, and see Nitadori speak to Miss Conductor with teary eyes, and a lifeless voice.

"I'm...really sorry...to cause you, such trouble..."

This is the first time I heard Nitadori give such an inaudible voice. This is a precious experience. If it's inside a recording studio, this definitely will be an NG.

But now's OK.

You don't have to say anything now.

Right now, you--

Don't have to act.

"Erm...Mr Inspector?"

I look at the police officer.

I get the feeling that his eyes are as sharp as before, but just a little tender compared to it.

If I have to say that the previous expression is like eagle eyes that spotted a prey, the current expression is that of an eagle's eyes that want to rip its prey apart.

""What is it?"

"I'll explain the rest myself. Can I let her leave first? I heard that her family's rather strict."

"Hm..."

"So do I. We shall take a ride back."

Miss Kamishiro too stands up, lowering her head.

"It is not a crime, so I can't say anything either."

The police officer says so. Again, Miss Kamishiro bows to her, and gently lifts her up,

"Now then, Milady--shall we go? Let's wash your face before we leave."

It appears that Nitadori's able to stand up normally. I heave a sigh of relief.

Has Nitadori taken her wig and glasses back? I don't know. Miss Kamishiro holds Nitadori hand with her own, and the other holding onto the luggage bag, before she bids farewell to everyone present.

"Now then, everyone, we shall take our leave."

"..."

Nitadori too lowers her head in appreciation.

"There's a huge downpour out there. Be careful."

The police officer said.

The station attendant doesn't have a chance to say anything, and ushers the duo to the door.

I watch them leave.

"I shall be returning to my work then."

The conductor lady took her cap and got up, and bent her waist down, saying,

"My own fault--caused everyone to be really troubled. I'm really sorry about it."

This is a sportsman-like flair of apologizing.

Please apologize to those two policemen instead. Don't apologize to me. That'll bother me.

I couldn't say anything.

"Well, it's fine that nothing happened." Hearing the policemen say this, the train conductor lifted her head, and put the cap on before leaving the room.

"..."

Pam, I sat on the floor.

"Ha, hahaha..."

My knees are laughing. My face are laughing.

Having seen this, a police officer turns to his younger counterpart who's lazing away at the back,

"I'm fine here. I'll get there soon. So back first."

He gave such an order.

"Yes."

The young police officer answers with this brief reply, and turns to leave the infirmary.

Now then, it's just the police officer and me left.

"Hahaha..."

I'm laughing despite everything that happened. I feel that I'm having a terrible look on my face, but I'm still living.

I never thought that I'll be encountering such a thing in my life. I recollect the past.

"I say."

Unlike before, the police officer starts to talk to me with an earnest tone. He then seats on the floor with a thus, sitting side by side with me. I shiver.

"...Wh-what is it?"

"Is this really okay?"

That's all he merely asks.

"It's fine."

And this is all I answer.

"I see. Now then, be careful on your way back."

"I will. Thanks."

"But I guess you better cover up that thing on your neck."

"Ah? Ahh, I guess..."

There are clear fingerprint marks on my neck, showing that I was strangled. Looking at this, I'm guessing that the fact I nearly got killed will be leaked.

Even in a major city like Tokyo, I guess there aren't that many people who were nearly choked to death. I'll attract a lot of attention.

I get onto my feet, look at the mirror, and try to pull my collar up. It manages to cover for the time being, but I have to hold it down with my hands. It'll be rather troublesome to continue maintaining this situation.

The police officer too gets to his feet, taking a face towel from the side of my bed, and hands it over to me.

"Hey, use this to over."

"Eh? --I can take this?"

"Just one, so it's fine, I suppose. I just need to say 'I threw it away after wiping off the nosebleed'."

Is this really alright, Mr Police Officer? But to be honest, he really helped me out a lot.

I put the towel over my neck.

It's a little weird, but no weirder than having a choke mark on my neck.

"Thanks. I'll buy a muffler from the shops in the station."

"That's good. I'll be heading back then. Don't forget your bag."

"Yes."

I take my bag out of the basket, pull the zipper, and sling it over my right shoulder.

"Thank you very much."

I then lower my head in thanks. The police officer then says to me,

"In your next meeting, pull yourself through."

I tilt my head, answering,

"I'm intending not to cause as much of an uproar as possible..."

The police officer then teased me.

"You idiot! I'm referring to when you meet her the next time!"

Chapter 8 - Final Chapter - May 22, I touched her

May 22nd.

On this day, I'm taking the Limited Express to Tokyo, seated at the usual seat by the window.

The train's already moving under the clear blue skies of May. The scenery of the platform slowly departs.

The seat beside me remains empty.

Will Nitadori arrive here?

She will.

I know that.

On the prior week, May 15th.

As for what happened to me after I left the sick bay--

First, I had the towel wrapped around my neck, and in the station that was packed with people who were headed home, I went through the gentry.

Then, I hurried to the station building, looking for a muffler. Given that it's May, I can't find a shop that sells one.

But I found an Afghan scarf sold in a sundry shop, called a 'Shemagh'.

It's a large, thin piece of fabric worn by the residents of the dry area. Recently, this scarf has become a trendy fashion item.

I did investigate on ways to wrap this when I debuted the desert tribe in 'Vice Versa'. This scarf is very convenient; it can be wrapped on the head to block out the sun, and wrapped around the face when there is a sandstorm.

This is it! I thought, and hurriedly bought it.

I bought two, just in case I needed an extra one. The color's a dark yellow, and there's patterns on it in light ink.

I then ran to the washroom.

There are various ways to wrap the Shemagh, and I chose to use the common triangular method. It's a poor example, but it does look like a drool bib.

It's a waste to throw away the towel, so I decided to use it, and kept it in my bag.

On that day, I did not pass through the gantry again. I did not take the bus, and instead, took a taxi directly to the hotel.

The scenario of 'me not feeling well' did not happen.

I was choked until I was unconscious, but it's fine that I managed to wake up. Strictly speaking, it appears that my brain cells took quite a bit of damage, but I'm unable to realize that.

The reasons why I chose to take a taxi were because there was a huge downpour--

And I needed some time to myself to think.

Of course, it was about Nitadori.

There was something I had to tell her no matter what.

If only I had a cellphone number or a mail address to contact her, but right now, I can only regret. Speaking of which, it's too difficult for me to ask something like that from a girl in my class.

Would Nitadori show up for the After Record the next day? Even if she did, I would hardly have the chance to talk to her.

Would Nitadori show up at school starting Monday? Even if she did, I would hardly have the chance to talk to her...

And so, on Friday morning.

I had been feeling frustrated before I slept, but I did manage to sleep well. After I woke up, I felt refreshed.

I checked myself in the hotel's mirror, and found the clear marks on the neck.

Those were the imprints left by Nitadori's icy, slender fingers. The color got darker, and I don't suppose they'll vanish these few days, I put on the Afghan Scarf, and head off to the After Record.

I entered the Control Room,

"Oh! Sensei, you're being trendy here. It does suit you!"

The producer greeted me, saying that.

In any case, being praised is something to be always being happy about. Feeling optimistic, I looked at the voice actors behind the soundproof glass, and realized that Nitadori wasn't there.

Before recording began, the sound director told everyone in the recording booth.

"Ehh--Miss Nitadori today won't be here as she's feeling unwell. The voice actor portraying villager A will be--"

The After Record of the seventh episode ended successfully.

The story is adapted until the end of the first volume. In other words, after the battle in Reputation ended, Sin went to Japan, and found Yui and Shin, who returned to his original world.

The visuals and everyone's acting were impeccable.

The editor-in-charge and I were headed to the lobby,

"Yaho! Sensei!"

The voice actor portraying as Shin earnestly spoke to me.

I guess he has a fondness of me? On a side note, he brought in rookie voice actresses today, two of them, in fact.

"That Shemagh's pretty cool, isn't it? --Did your girlfriend give you that?"

"Well...sort of."

I answered. I couldn't tell the truth, but I didn't want to lie either. This is basically a lie, but the one who necessitated me to wrap this shawl on myself was her'.

"Whw--! Hey hey, come here for a while."

The voice actor left the two rookie actresses and went to me. He patted me on the shoulder with a genial action that wouldn't annoy anyone, and brought his face to my ear.

He then spoke with a voice similar to Shin's.

"You can't do that, sensei...little Nitadori will cry, you know? Good thing she's on leave today."

"What? ...Why?"

"Because when we shook hands the last time, Nitadori was watching you leave the entire time. She couldn't respond no matter what I said, you know?"

"..."

"Don't you understand? She's fallen for you for you, sensei."

"...How exactly has she fallen for me?"

"Hmm, I suppose it's because of your personality?"

I returned home on Sunday night.

I had been staying in the hotel on Friday and Saturday nights, with all expenses paid by myself.

That was because I wanted to let the scar on my neck fade as much as possible before I went home. I couldn't let mom see this.

I called mom beforehand, telling her that I would be gathering research material before I returned.

As it was the weekend, I was worried if there was no room available, but I managed to stay in. I was relieved.

I spent most of the time in the hotel, writing, and only on Saturday afternoon did I go touring around in Tokyo, all in the name of gathering materials.

I had already thought of Shin and Yui heading to Tokyo because of extra curriculum lessons in Tokyo (and Sin would show up there), so I surveyed Asakusa and the Sensoji there, and then visited the Tokyo Skytree that was located there, thinking of using these locations as stages of the story. I also rode a boat alone down the Sumida River, and took a lot of pictures.

I would worry whenever I thought about Nitadori, but I won't do anything the next time we meet. I can't continue to worry, and after such consideration, I arranged this tour.

I returned home, and luckily, mom starting taking the night shift from this week onwards.

We practically won't be meeting, and I'm able to easily hide the marks on my neck.

On Monday, I went to school as normal.

I wore the Afghan scarf to school, and never took it off, even during class.

I said I had a flu during gym class, so my homeroom teacher and my classmates did not really say anything.

Well, I hardly talk to my classmates even if there was nothing anyway.

And so, Nitadori--

Did not come to school.

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday.

She probably did contact the school,

"Nitadori will be absent today too."

For the homeroom teacher simply recorded it down in the attendance book.

Thursday.

That's today.

I didn't know if Nitadori would come to school, but I had prepared this beforehand. I had the printed draft in my bag before I went to school.

The marks on my neck seemed to have vanished completely, so I did not put on the Afghan carf.

I went to school slightly earlier than usual, and was reading books in the classroom.

"Eri! It's been a while! How are you?"

I didn't know whose voice it was, but I knew that Nitadori came to school.

And then, I understood that she came to school without having changed much, with the color contact lense and the glasses on.

"Hm...I got a weird, little flu. I'm fine now though."

I heard the voice from behind, and it's the same as usual.

And then, I heard the sound of the chair being pulled out, and the sound of her sitting down.

I heard those sounds for quite a few times already, but I gave a little smile.

I didn't know what kind of expression Nitadori was showing.

And so, same as before, I left my seat once it was break time, only to return when at the last minute.

When I leave the classroom, I would go by the front door, and return from the back door. Thus, I would only see her back.

Following this would be language class.

The recital today would be done by--me.

Classes began.

The teacher called my name.

"Yes."

I answered.

'Nobody's pointing a gun at my head though'.

I thought as I stood up. Nitadori was seated behind me.

I did not have a book in hand.

I was merely holding a few pages off the draft prints.

"Erm...what I'm going to recite today...eh...it's not a book."

I said."

My classmates let out a little murmur. *What's with that?*. However, the shock doesn't seem to be as big as it was with 'Momotaro'.

"It's a novel--"

I felt that there was still some time to look back, but I didn't.

"The title is 'Vice Versa'."

There's the sound of the table and chair shaking behind me. I continue,

"It's what people call a light novel, and I like it. There are a few volumes of the pocket books out--but what I want to recite is the unpublished part."

This isn't a lie.

"This part is from the work the author uploaded onto the internet when he's free, and after he debuted, he deleted this part. It wasn't popular back then, so I feel that most people didn't know of its existence either."

This part is a barefaced lie. This isn't the truth. Ever since that incident, I felt that my acting got better.

This time, I really heard a chair being pulled greatly from behind me.

Please, don't run away.

I prayed earnestly as I quickly explained the situation,

"This story describes the scenes of a character's death. Eh, this girl called Meek is a Homunculus, a man-made character. She died suddenly in a huge battle, and so her corpse was brought to the main character. It's a rather shocking scene, actually."

Then, before Nitadori could run,

"I'll begin."

I began reading,

"Meek died...?"

Sin asked a rhetorical question. This were not question a prince who won a massive battle would say.

Kind, weak, unreliable. These were the attributes he should never show in front of his subordinates. Sin understood this well, and till this point, he never showed off that kind of attitude.

"Yes. Is there anything strange about soldiers dying on a battlefield?"

Pluto's attitude was a stark contrast, brave and courageous, never losing any of the dignity any warrior would have. She was blunt in her attitude, as if to say that the death of a mere subordinate was to be expected.

(These two are really stupid.)

Shin thought.

Sin showcased the kind side he tried so hard to hide in the past, and Pluto was the complete opposite. Both Sin and Pluto should be showing opposite attitudes.

It was just reciting, but I merely read it flatly.

I didn't put in any emotions, my lines sounded forced, my voice was soft, and I liked fluency.

To add on, there's no way to know who's Shin or Sin in this recitation, and I didn't explain who Pluto is. This recitation was probably hard to understand for those who never read 'Vice Versa'.

But I didn't mind.

This recitation was meant for the one person in the world I want to say it to.

I continued,

(Then...what do I do?)

Shin asked himself, brooding over it. He could not obtain the answer.

In Reputation, he's an immortal. Like a game character, he could revive countless times. Because of that, Shin was able to keep fighting 'without giving his best'. He watched the people around him die from afar.

But even so, perhaps he should be giving a similar attitude, knowing that the Homunculus who treated him so kindly in the past died? Should he not feel anguished? Even if he merely intended to treat this as a game, that was a real death which he could never retract back on.

He couldn't find the answer. Was it because he could not think? Or that his brain was resisting, thinking that there was no need to think? Or--

"Come here."

Hearing Pluto order him with a harsh tone, Shin recovered,

Is...there something?

Never once did she summon Shin before. The only one who could talk to her face to face was Sin, leader of his own country.

Shin turned his head around in shock, only to see the warrior dressed in armor stained by enemy blood commanded him with a harsh stare,

"Come here--ah, Prince, I'm borrowing this immortal body for the time being."

"Make sure he returns. He's an important fighting strength."

Leaving those words behind, Sin left the place, wanting to establish the casualties suffered and his remaining fighting strength.

Shin understood well. At this point, Sin had no time to grieve over Meek's death.

Shin quietly walked down the tense several hundred meters. He was brought to a simple tent used by Pluto's forces.

Shin heard before that when setting camp on such an open plain, the commander protect himself by setting up a plain, simple tent, just as the soldiers would, and hide amongst them. But though it was plain, and though they were allied forces, this area was her headquarters, and not a place for Sin's subordinates to actually enter.

Shin silently entered Pluto's tent. It was unexpectedly bright, for inside this tent that was no more than 3m in diameter, the sun shone in through the gaps on the top, so it was unexpectedly bright. There was a simple, easily assembled bed.

The subordinates entered 20 seconds later, moving a corpse onto the bed.

It was Meek's body, a large patch of blood on her abdomen.

There was no custom on Reputation to close the deceased's eyes. The wine red right eye and the yellow left eye were glittering due to the sunlight shining in.

Shin's ind recalled the incident when he first met Meek in the basement, and the few conversations they had thereafter.

Should he cry? Should he feel sad? Or should he vomit? --He could do neither of them.

That was all he could only think. In this world, he was merely a powerless outsider, unable to feel death.

Shin didn't understand why Pluto wanted to show him Meek's corpse, and asked,

"Wha... are you...?"

"Watch."

Pluto told her men to back down, and replied shouting. She removed the leather gloves from her hands, and drew a dagger from her waist.

And then, she stabbed into Meek's large right eye.

"..."

Shin could not stop her, and could not look away.

He heard the soft sound of flesh being ripped apart, and the sound of fluids dripping it. Pluto was gorging out Meek's eye.

Pluto gorged the right eye out with the dagger, and placed it on her right hand.

"Hm!"

She then crushed the eye gently. Thinking about it, her slender fingers were really feminine. The white liquid oozed out from her slender fingers.

Some of the liquid dripped onto the left eye of Meek's corpse, and the cheek below the right eye socket that was hollowed out.

She opened the clenched left fist, and there appeared a gemstone. The ball-shaped gem showed a radiant wine red.

The eyes of a Homunculus were the gemstones infused by their masters--Shin recalled what Meek said.

And so, Pluto's left hand grabbed the back of Shin's head, her right hand holding down his forehead that had nowhere to escape.

"Guh!"

Shin immediately understood the reason why his forehead was hurting; the gemstone was forcefully pressed against him, almost sinking into his flesh.

"..."

However, Shin could understand why Meek's face appeared in front of him.

Meek was standing in front of Shin, so close it appeared she was about to kiss him.

They were so close together, so Shin could not see her entire body, but he knew that she was not wearing any clothes, for in the corner of his vision, he saw the frame of the white skin collarbone.

Meek's face had eyes on them, as before. The right was wine red, and the left was yellow.

She slowly gave a smile, smiling benevolently,

"Ah, Shin..."

While Shin heard Meek call for his name, her smile suddenly vanished. Following that, appearing in front of Shin's eyes was Pluto, who pulled her right hand back. Her expression was as intimidating as a demon's.

"Did you see it?"

"Wha--?"

"Did you see it? Did you hear the voice?"

"..."

Shin affirmed wordlessly,

"I guessed so...your immortal body isn't due to magic, but a relic that surpasses human intelligence in this world, I suppose..."

Pluto muttered, moving her right hand down. Shin had never seen Pluto give such a tragic look on the fact, and then, he understood that he would never see it again.

"I suppose you don't know, so I'll tell you now. The gemstone used to activate any Homunculus aren't created by us. They are dug out. That is a relic created by the 'Great Ancient Civilization'. We can't create them, and we can't repair them. All we can do is grant them one life. These artificial beings are living creatures after all. As long as the body dies, the gemstone will ultimately lose strength."

"...And then?"

"I'm the ruler of a country. Be respectful, kid. However, today's an exception--Meek's dead. The power of this gemstone will vanish in the end."

"..."

"As long as it's not replenished with the power that's beyond human understanding."

"Thenn..."

"I shall craft this into a pendant for you to carry."

And so, Shin saw it,

He saw Pluto crouch on the floor, opening a small wooden box, and several thin chains placed inside. Then, he saw Pluto continue on with fluid actions, using the hand holding the dagger till this point to embed the gem into a metal ring, fastening the chain.

"You..."

"I was born in a town of jewellery factories, boy from the other world."

Shin suddenly heard the voice of a kind woman.

"..."

Who's that?

Shin nearly blurted out these words, only to swallow them back in.

"Thus, I always wanted to do this. I want to live a life of making jewellery, pendants for those girls attending weddings so that they can smile. However, my bloodline doesn't allow for that. Do you believe this? I'm born out of wedlock to the king."

"Pluto..."

"When I was connecting chains, I was Janet. No matter how old I am, how many people I killed, I'll never forget my name--look, it's done. Reach your hands out."

Shin reached his hands out as told he was scooping water, and accepted these words and the pendant from the woman called Janet who was looking up at him, giving a gentle look.

"Don't lose it, okay?"

In response, Shin received the pendant.

"As long as this gemstone touches your body, it will never lose strength. It can leave for a while. Oh yes, you can't have it leave your skin for more than a day. When you receive a Homunculus, put that eyeball in, and Meek will revive. It doesn't matter whether you want

to do it tomorrow or after the war ends, that is your right as the master. Do you understand?"

Shin put the ends of the chain around the back of the neck. He did not know the theory behind it, but whenever the ends of the chain were about to touch, there was a faint metallic sound, latching together. Shin placed the front of the pendant on his chest. He felt the weight of it, and answered,

"I understand now, Miss Janet."

"No need for the respectful courtesy now. People know that Janet of the jewellery workshop is the beloved, earnest craftswoman when you mention her. Remember that.

".....Yes!"

"That's all I have to say. I'm going to bury the dead. Get out now."

"Thanks, Pluto."

"Be courteous now, kid.

"Thanks."

" ..."

"I'll definitely find out the reason why I'm transported to this world. I'll do all I can. So don't die, at least until that moment."

Don't worry, I'm not going to die that easily."

Pluto slowly opened the tent.

And Shin continued on under the bright sun.

Thus, Meek became a bracelet. The girl called 'Instant'--would continue to glow as long as she was with Shin.

"No matter how cold it is...I guess it's fine."

Shin muttered. That pendant would forever remain warm on his chest.

I'll be waiting...until the day we meet again.

He could vaguely hear her voice.

--That's all."

I read until the end, and sat down immediately.

This part didn't sound very fluid when I read it. I paused several times, and repeated the parts I misread. I was sweating all over, and it was annoying.

Halfway through, I knew very well that most of my classmates were annoyed with it.

Of course. I was reading a novel with such atrocious presentation, and the context unknown. If I have to say, this part's written pretty messily. If the editor-in-charge is to see this, he'll probably point out issues without holding back.

Looking at the clock, I felt that I probably managed to meet the minimum time required, or exceeded it. I was desperate as I read, and I couldn't afford to notice the time.

Luckily, the teacher never stopped me by saying 'alright, that is enough'. If I was stopped without reading out the ending, everything I did would be futile.

I did what I wanted to do. I have no regrets.

"Now, the next one--"

The teacher mentioned the next name, but I did not pay heed to it.

The one seated behind me never said anything.

There's another chance today.

This chance was so miraculous that I was further convinced that there's a God.

I finished my lunch at the cafeteria, and was on the way to the library, passing by the corridor.

I found Eri Nitadori.

She, and two other girls, were walking down the corridor towards me.

As usual, she was wearing those glasses, had that long hair, and the usual hair clips--used to hold down her wig.

The trio would have pass by me if they did not enter the Audio-Visual room on the way here.

I knew Nitadori saw me. She lowered her head stiffly, slowed down, and passed by the entrance of the audio visual room.

Once I knew that we would pass each other--

An idea sprouted within me.

I did not need to make notes.

I just needed to do it.

Luckily, back then, I--

Couldn't be bothered to wonder if I could do it. All I needed to do next was to make full use of the God-given chance.

First, I passed by the two girls.

And two seconds later, I passed by Nitadori.

And so, I reached my left arm out.

For the first time, I touched Nitadori's, no, a girl's shoulder--

I see. It's so soft.

Nitadori shivered in shock, stopping in her tracks, and then turned her glasses and brown eyes at me.

I then said with a voice only Nitadori can hear,

"You owe me one! Stella!"

As for what happened to Nitadori thereafter.

I hurried to the library, never looking back, and so I did not know what happened to her thereafter.

I even wondered if she actually heard my words.

The only time I realized the outcome--

Was after school.



I was cleaning the classroom.

In this school, the students would be grouped based on their register number, and each group would take turns to clean the classroom.

Surprisingly, the other places, like the corridors and gym would be left to a hired cleaning company at night. The students just need to clean the classroom.

Of course, Nitadori was of a different group from me, and she had long left the classroom.

I moved the tables and chairs aside, sweeping one half of the classroom. I then moved them to the other side, sweeping the other half.

I don't hate such a simple job. I like thinking about all kinds of things, piling up the rubbish and dust together. It's interesting seeing the rubbish and dust in the classroom slowly gather as a hill.

Even so, as it'll be 20 minutes later before I return home, I don't really like to participate in cleaning other than the week itself.

Once the cleaning ended, I put the cleaning tools in the shed, and a certain girl came to talk to me from behind,

"Erm...mind a moment?"

Nobody in class would talk to me unless there was an important reason. In this situation, I assumed that she wanted me to put the broom into the closet.

I thought I was the last one, no? But it's nothing major--thinking about it, I turned around, and found two girls glaring at me.

The girls were not holding anything.

They were staring at me. Both of them were standing closely, side by side, and they looked scared.

There were only a few people left in the classroom, and they were holding their bags, preparing to leave. As expected, I was the last one using the tools.

"..."

I remained silent, and one of them asked heinously,

"What did you say to Eri during noon?"

I understood.

They were the girls walking alongside Nitadori on the corridor back then.

The good luck continued on, something to be grateful for. These two proved that Nitadori did hear what I said.

I was really grateful for those two--

But I couldn't answer this question.

"Erm...I didn't really say...anything important."

It's tough for me to talk with people I don't know (even though they're my classmates). I stammered.

And immediately, the other one lashed out at me,

"Eri immediately went to the toilet after that, and cried out loud!"

Ah, I see.

Nitadori--

Once she knew the meaning behind Meek's name, I suppose she cried in the train toilet too?

Back then, it was May 1st.

I did not know what Nitadori was so emotional after she learned of the meaning as 'instant'.

Thus, while reciting the manuscript yesterday, I again checked the word Meek.

And then, for the first time, I found the existence of the English word 'meek'.

The meanings were--

"Honest, compliant, docile, obedient."

I understood.

So that was how it was.

Looking at the meaning of this word--

It was not strange for the Homunculus' name to be misunderstood as something bad.

What intent did I have when I named Meek? I suppose she had been worrying about this.

"Are you listening?"

Hearing that, my consciousness returned to the classroom.

"What did you say? Did you go overboard?"

"Say something, please! I'll report to the teacher accordingly!"

I continued to be verbally assaulted by the duo, thinking.

I'm really grateful for these two

But right now, I don't have a way to express my thanks.

All I could do was to play dumb and not lie.

"Erm...well...I didn't really...say anything. Actually...I didn't think she would cry."

I forced out this answer, and both of them got even infuriated.

"Enough already! You're terrible!"

"Next time, if we see you get close to Eri again, we'll sue you for being a stalker!"

Both of them unleashed slap-like attacks, and turned away. They went to their tables, grabbed their bags, and left the classroom; I was the only one left.

As for me,

"Both of you--thank you."

I muttered these thanks to the classmates whose names I did not know.

On that evening, after all that happened--

The train begins to move.

It accelerates successfully, continuously tossing the world outside the window to the back.

I stare blankly at the scenery outside.

Soon after, the automatic doors near the back open, letting out a soothing sound.

I see the black hair of the person entering the carriage, and immediately realize who it is.

She stands beside my seat, asking,

"Is the seat beside you empty? May I have a seat?"

I lift my head and look at her,

"No."

I answer.

"The seat beside me isn't empty. Please don't sit here."

My words are a little harsh, very cold, but those are my true feelings, so I have no choice on this matter.

"Really, no?"

She asks again. I knew what she's thinking, but I certainly can't agree to this.

"I said no, and that means no. How about the window seat on the other side? The view of the mountains today is very pretty."

I say, and,

"Hmph!"

Miss Kamishiro, wearing a deep blue business suit and skirt, looked displeased as she snorts. She then places Nitadori's luggage to the back of the seat, and follows my suggestion by sitting at the seat on the other side.

Then, I say to the girl standing beside Miss Kamishiro.

"I left a place for you."

I intended to force a smile, but I don't know if I managed to make one.

She, who had lowered her head for a while, lowers it further, and then, she hands over the convenience store bag to me.

"..."

And I accept it wordlessly.

And as usual, Nitadori--

Had her black hair carefully tied in a knot, draping it over her right shoulder, down to her chest before sitting down.

"Sensei..."

I can hear a barely audible voice.

I place the convenience store bag, slightly larger than usual, on my thighs, and looked at Nitadori who was seated on my right.

Nitadori isn't looking at me. Opposite her sidelong, lowered face, I can see Miss Kamishiro glaring at me, and I look away.

"I..lied...to...you, sensei..."

Hearing Nitadori continue to stammer, I close my eyes.

Nitadori's willing to sit next to me. Now then, what we can talk about now? What will she say? What kind of attitude will she show.

I don't know at all.

To be honest, i'm scared of it.

But I can't run away. This is because, if she isn't willing to stand up, I won't be able to leave my seat. I coaxed her into sitting here, having realized this fact.

Once I calm myself down, I again open my eyes. Nitadori still isn't looking at me.

"What kind of lie?"

I ask.

Finally, Nitadori lifts her head, and turns to the left to look at me. Her face remains rigid, the pupils beneath her glasses showing the same colors.

"I--"

Nitadori says,

"Only eat consommé flavored potato chips. I hate everything else. Especially sea salt flavor."

I look at the bag placed on my thighs.

Inside it are the salt flavored ones, together with the consommé flavor.

I quickly inhale to say what I want.

"Eh? I think that consommé doesn't feel right in some way. Isn't consommé some kind of soup flavor in the first place? Is there significance in using this to make snacks?"

I think the word 'dumbfounded' can aptly describe Nitadori now.

I can see such pearly white teeth from her agape mouth. The rich brown eyes behind the light grassy glasses are looking at me.

"N-no..."

Nitadori's mouth then mouths slightly, and then, she starts to twitch agitatedly,

"That's not it! I feel that saying 'we shouldn't replicate consommé flavor on potato chips' is being disrespectful to the who initially made that flavor! That person must have tried all kinds of possibilities before deriving the answer! To be honest, I don't understand the reason for sea salt flavor! Can they can make it 'salt' flavored instead? And there'll be a lot of salt on the teeth!"

So I proceed to retort,

"That's an unavoidable ritual for a sea salt flavor supremacist. It's destiny. If you have to care about that, you won't be able to swallow! Just look in the mirror and brush. Speaking of which, the consommé flavor is too strong; it'll linger."

"Strong? The sea salt flavor doesn't lose out in that, right? Those that like it says it's an aroma, but those that hates it says that it's a strong stench. I think this logic can be used for all kinds of food! Anyway, which flavor do you think the supermarkets provide more of? Consommé or sea salt? It's definitely consommé. There's no way to find sea salt unless you really look for that."

"I agree, but we can't discuss this world based on sales numbers itself. I believe that one day, the sea salt side will be the majority and be the ruling party."

"That day will never come! Anyway, I'm starting to wonder if there's any country other than Japan that accepts sea salt flavor!"

We continue with our argument without stopping until the conductor arrives.

Neither of us held back in this conversation.

Not a single respectful word occurs.

Soon after, Miss Kamishiro sharply tells us,

"Both of you, your tickets need to be checked."

We stop our argument, and fish out the tickets from our wallet and coat respectively. Then, we exchange looks with Miss Conductor, who arrive on the aisle.

"..."

I remain silent.

"..."

Nitadori too remain silent.

"...Please show your tickets..."

Miss Conductor continues to work hard as she has to do her job.

The one I want to apologize to is there. Miss Conductor's professional smile looks obviously rigid. I cautiously hand over the ticket, and then receive it.

Nitadori too looks aside as she does likewise.

Miss Conductor checks Miss Kamishio's ticket, put my hand on the brim of her cap.

"Th-thank you very much."

I say to her in a less than fluid manner. Actually, I really do want to say a lot to her.

Miss Conductor intends to pass through the opened automatic doors, only to stop,

"Please do get along well."

She says with a timid look.

"Get along? Of course we are. So good that we're bickering away."

I answer, and Miss Conductor gives a grimace.

"It's fine, we'll watch ourselves."

Hearing Nitadori says this, I feel something on my right cheek.

I don't know what it is, but it feels soft.

Looking at the glasses that appears and disappears from the edge of my right eye, and the widened eyes of Miss Conductor, I realize that it's Nitadori's lips.

Miss Conductor shakes her head, practically saying 'I don't want to get involved with you'.

"Thank you for taking this ride."

Saying that, she passes through the automatic doors, leaving. The doors quickly close.

I turn to the right.

First, I see Miss Kamishiro bare her fangs as she looks as though she wants to kill me with her eyes.



"Fufu."

And then, I see the sidelong face of Eri Nitadori giving a chuckle--

Or perhaps that is Stella Hamilton.

I don't know which is the actual name.

No, both of them should be the actual name.

In Japan, she'll call herself 'Eri Nitadori'--

When overseas, she'll probably use 'Stella Hamilton'.

This is the reason why Nitadori once said something strange, 'this is the name I use'. She meant 'just use my Japanese name'.

I'm guessing that Nitadori is of mixed ancestry from Japan and a foreign country (or maybe one quarter). Looking at the hair color, she might look like a Japanese, or a foreigner.

By using the name of that particular country, nobody would bear too much curiosity. With a name in the local language, there's an advantage of it being easy to remember.

A few days ago, I investigated something on the internet. I learned that the name 'Stella' can be nicknamed as 'Ellie'.

I'm unfamiliar with English, and I've no idea how Stella becomes Ellie--

But the name Eri is derived from Ellie.

Eri can be called Ellie no matter which country she goes to. I know that her parents did think through this properly.

From what I can deduce, the reason why she's studying in eleventh grade while I'm in tenth grade is because she skipped years. The reader's letter only stated school years, so I thought she's older than me.

I'm thinking that Stella Hamilton, so outstanding at mental calculations, should probably be adept at studying, and started skipping grades since her third year of middle school. That kind of thing isn't rare at all in foreign countries.

That reader wrote on the letter that she's born with different colored eyes..

And no matter whether she likes it or not, it's obvious that her right eye's a faint grey, and her left is a deep brown.

Thus, no matter whether it's Japan or overseas, she's always been mocked, envied, and sometimes even bullied.

So now--

Nitadori probably began using color contact lense to hide the color of her right eye ever since she transferred to this school. I heard that color contact lenses were tools developed to treat 'heterochromia'.

Also, she wears a wig, and she doesn't attend gym classes at all just in case her wig falls off. She'll be careful when seated on chairs that are slightly higher--

And to avoid going through the bullying that made her contemplate suicide again, Nitadori portrays an ordinary high school girl.

Nitadori just so happened to read my novel when she's in ninth grade.

And then, she empathized with meek, who went through similar circumstances and appearance.

She sent me a highly emotional letter, and received the one reply I currently sent.

She was shocked when I said 'my handwriting's terrible', and that's because she read the words I wrote so deliberately.

And so, after a year and a half--

Nitadori received a chance to portray Meek.

I don't know exactly how hard she worked for this.

Maybe...she used her parents money or some unique bypass without me knowing. Even if that's the case, I don't mind. It's fine not to know the truth sometimes.

Us studying in the same school is just a mere coincidence.

There's no way she could have realized where I live. The replies to fan letters are all sent from Tokyo where I had meetings, so she wouldn't be able to know my residence through the mailing.

And speaking of which--she probably doesn't know that I'm a year older than her.

It's just a coincidence, but in this area, this is the only private high school that doesn't particularly pay that much detail on attendance.

We're in similar circumstances and we enrolled in the same school.

Nitadori has been acting in front of me.

Showing me the 'I'm not that devoted fan called Stella'.

I suppose the reason why she looked so uneasy that day when she heard me ask 'when did you start acting', but probably because I saw through her.

But well, I'm not that sharp.

Nitadori, as a devoted fan of 'Vice Versa',

Sent a letter to the author,

Received the only reply from the author,

Read the entire series,

And even won the opportunity to voice her favorite character--

I don't intend to blame her for peeking into the manuscript in my bag.

I was really careless for leaving the bag behind and going to the toilet.

Of course, I never imagined that Eri would be Stella.

Once she knew that the character she likes so much she put herself in the character, and finally had a chance to voice--

Would just die like that, and never to appear again--

I feel that 'she might want to strangle the author once or twice'.

Of course, back then, when I was strangled, I thought,

I was really going to be strangled by her.

It's not strange for me to die.

I could have died if not for Miss Conductor passing by coincidentally.

But I don't begrudge Nitadori.

I didn't die. Even if I really died, it's nothing much. I'll just die.

There's only one that I hope for now. That is that she doesn't feel overly remorseful on what she did, causing inner trauma.

So one day--

I have to talk to Nitadori properly about this.

But it doesn't have to be today.

If possible, from now on, we'll continue to chat as we want on this train.

I ask my female classmate who is my junior and a voice actress, who just kissed me,

"Boss that--"

I wanted to say, that was,

Unable to do so, I repeat myself again,

"Was dab--"

Too bad.

"Was, that."

Finally, I said it.

"Was that...an act?"

"Well, who knows ...? Even I do not know ..."

Nitadori continues to lower her head slightly, answering in respectful language.

I decide on my own to see her as being in 'Nitadori mode' when she not using respectful language, and 'Stella mode' when she's in cautious, respectful mode as a fan. I just decided on this.

I feel that her face is a little red as she lowers her head. Maybe I'm the same too.

"Or--are you trying to repay me?"

I ask without thinking too much, and she immediately lifts her head with fiery eyes, staring right at me.

"No! There's still a lot more--how much favor do you think I owe you?"

The expression she answers that so seriously is so pretty, fleeting and beautiful.

I think.

I hope to use her.

I want to use her as the basis of a light novel character.

If possible, I don't want to care about 'Vice Versa' (to all the fans, I'm sorry.) I want to start writing a novel with her as the heroine.

I--

I'm a High School Boy and a Bestselling Light Novel author, my heart occupied by my female classmate who is my junior and a voice actress.

May 29th.

It was Thursday noon, when the midterms finally ended after starting from Monday.

Like usual, I'll be riding the Limited Express to Tokyo in the evening--

But unlike before, I have more than enough time today. There's no need for me to hurry up.

I'll first have lunch in the cafeteria, and then I'll slowly walk home.

"Erm..."

A girl starts to talk to me.

Of course, it's not Nitadori."

"From now on, we won't be talking to each other in school after all."

That's the promise both of us made last Thursday.

Nitadori is still seated behind me. I heard her putting her stuff into her bag all this while, only to stop because of the girl who came to talk to me for some reason.

"Y-yes?"

I remained seated as I turned to the one asking the question.

Naturally, the one standing there is my classmate. This girl has short black hair, a petite figure, and gives an obedient vibe.

We have been attending classes together for almost 2 months, but I don't remember her name. I never spoke to her before. I guess she's...probably not one of the girls who questioned me about Nitadori.

She looks at my face nervously. I've no idea what she wants to say at all.

I'm worried that she'll have the other classmates giving strange looks to her because she's talking to me, who never talked to anyone else in class, and so I look around, but it appears I worried too much.

Then,

"Erm, about last week, that recitation."

She continued with respectful language.

Huh?

I get the feeling that something bad's about to happen.

The insensitive danger sensor inside my head starts to run.

"About the 'Vice Versa' part you recited in class--"

I better run away.

"If you can see it on the website, do you mind telling me the site address? If it can't be seen, I hope that you'll at least show me a copy of that printed script."

I better run away immediately, I guess?

This timid girl seems to have shaken off all her qualms once she reaches this point, and her expression suddenly changes,

"To be honest!"

Her face brightens immediately as she says,

"I'm really a devoted fan of the 'Vice Versa' book series! I read through all the works! I'm really looking forward to the anime that's going to begin airing in July!"

Wow! Thank you! Thank you!"

"Ah...ahem, I-I see."

I fake a cough, covering my mouth as I say this. It'll be bad if I'm seen giggling to myself.

"I discovered this work ever since the first volume was sold, but I didn't know that it's originally a web novel!"

Yeah, that's a lie.

"If there's a chance to look at the latest plot developments, I want to see it! Especially the part you read! I want to know the result!"

No, that's impossible.

That's because I only rewrote the parts I read, and the editor-in-charge told me 'the plot's good, but the essay's a little messy', so I have to edit it. Also, I need to make sure the plot developments thereafter makes sense, so I'm currently editing the manuscript of the eleventh volume.

I can't mention these unspeakable matters to her. This girl continues to grin and blurt out,

"Erm...if possible...as a fellow 'Vice Versa' fan, can I have a chat with you? Can we go talk about this in the cafeteria? Actually...I had been intending to chat with you on this ever since exams ended!"

Blam!

The sound of the chair shaking could be heard from the seat behind me.

To be continued...

Afterwords

Notice!

The following 'afterword' is different from the norm. It is a 'spoiler filled afterword'.

For those who have yet to read the main story, please do not read this afterword.

If you do, you will regret it for the next 3 days! In other words--you won't be regretting it for 4 days and more.

Once this afterword ends, there will be a 'normal afterword that is spoiler-free like usual', so everyone can read that first.

"Since it's Sigsawa, this afterword is probably the same as the others in being spoiler-free, so let's have a look!"

For those who had such thoughts at this point, I did space out a few lines, so please, escape immediately. It's dangerous here.

Run away!

Run away right now!

Really, run away!

Have you escaped?

Well, that's how it is--can I start now? Has everyone else evacuated?

I assume that you, who didn't run away, did read the main text, right? Am I wrong?

Now then, I'm beginning.

I rarely write such 'spoiler filled afterword'.

This afterword will involve the content of the story, and it's really in depth. It's basically a normal explanation. Yes, I had an urge to try this for a long time.

This work was announced very early, the name was so unique, and it was already serialized on the niconico serialized novels', so the readers asked all kinds of questions (mainly on twitter).

I suppose I have to answer these questions here, and at the same time, talk about the story creation. It feels like an audio commentary of a movie. Yes, I had an urge to try this for a long time.

●The plot of this story I initially thought of.

I did mention in my previous afterword that I came up with this story in my dreams. However, when plotting this story, the plot had a drastic change.

Then, what exactly was the initial story?

To avoid revealing the story in the last volume's afterword, I could not explain back then. Now that I'm going to reveal this to everyone who completed this story--

The initial story was 'a rather passionate love comedy'.

The beginning was the same, that the protagonist, a high school student and an author, had his real identity known by his classmate, who works as a voice actress. However, there wasn't anything like the Limited Express showing up or anything. The protagonist was summoned to the library, and then, it was,

"Hey, sensei, please join the Drama Club!"

"Why?"

"Please write a scenario where I'll be the main character. I think you'll definitely be able to write a brilliant story."

"I'm a professional author though. If you ask me to write, I'll write...but how much are you going to pay me?"

"Aren't you scared of me spilling the beans?"

"Please allow me to write for free!"

Well, I felt writing this scenario out was a little too messy.

A school was the main setting, and there would be many other characters debuting, all kinds of tense situations revolving around the protagonist's secret, and the protagonist and heroine playing hide and seek with each other--

This story was a unique love graffiti, and was originally planned to be a light-hearted, cute, trendy love comedy series.

However...

Why did it end up like that?

I did mention in my previous 'afterword' that even I don't remember, since I didn't record that.

First, the plot changed, and the protagonist began to talk about the profession of an author in the train ride to Tokyo. As for the 'neck play', it was only added later on, but I can't remember when exactly did I add it.

Based on my records, it had been at least 3 years back (in 2011), that I began editing the file name based on the plot.

No no, seriously, how did it end up like that? --But I don't regret it.

I suppose it is my DNA to fully refuse writing an ordinary love comedy. Yes.

● About the story in the story, 'Vice Versa'.

The story in the story 'Vice Versa', plays a huge role in the story. As before, there was a huge difference in the initial conceptual phase.

In the first plot, I wrote a completely different story. The story had the main character transported to a different world (Well, it's the same till this point), pilots a huge robot in that world, and ended up with a Battle Royale that could be seen as a proxy war.

And again, during the conceptual phase, I had such a thought,

"Ah, in that case, it'll end in one volume. Even if the story's edited into an anime, I guess it's hard to make a second one."

So I didn't use that as the story in the story. This plot is such that even the ending was completed, and became 'a story I want to write in the future'. However, I don't know whether I'll be able to write it out at all, so I don't know whether that story is an upgrade or a downgrade. If I'm to write a story of a Robot Battle Royale,

"That's just as I thought!"

I hope that I'll be able to think this.

Now then--

"What a hassle. Now I need to think of another story as a story inside a story!"

And because of this, 'Vice Versa' was born.

As introduced in the story, in this story, I prioritized the advantageous concept of 'letting the protagonist be able to travel between two worlds and show off all kinds of settings'.when I came up with this story. I did write a simple setting, but after that, I really thought hard for a lot of ideas.

However, I hope that everyone can enjoy 'Vice Versa' as well as the actual text. Mr Kuroboshi even helped me with the character setting, and my heartfelt thanks really are hard to put in words.

Besides the story mentioned in the actual story, I did think of many scenarios...as for whether this story will be published as a spinoff, this is a little, well, please don't have too much hope on this.

Rather than have it as a novel, maybe I'll propose an 'original script', and have some air it as an anime? Is anyone interested? I see, guess not.

● Regarding the protagonist's name.

I suppose everyone who read the main text has realized--the protagonist in the main work never had his name shown, neither the real nor pen name. He's basically anonymous.

First off, I never intended to have a pen name for this one.

The reason is that I don't want a pen name similar to an author working in real life, even if it's just a little similar, so I thought, in that case, let's not have the pen name appear. I'll just have Nitadori and the other characters call the protagonist 'sensei', so in the writing process, this wouldn't cause any problem.

And then, regarding the real name--in the end, it didn't appear either.

Why, you ask? That's because, based on my final judgement, I felt that 'I could write a story even if the protagonist doesn't have a name', just like the absence of a pen name. However, I did have actual thoughts on coming up with a name.

I did try to think...but I couldn't.

I decided not to have a protagonist name, so I couldn't begin writing. I was really troubled by this for a long time, and I came up with a brilliant way to handle this,

"So what if I can't come up with a name! I'll write a novel with an anonymous protagonist! I'll show you!"

And so, I began writing this work that is without 'a named protagonist'.

I did try this method in a third person perspective, but this is the first time I'm using this in a first person perspective from the protagonist, and it was an adventure.

As expected, the editor-in-charge was initially opposed to me having a protagonist without a name. I was overruled, but this usually obedient me just wouldn't let this one point slide.

From here on, I hope that when you introduce and explain this work--please put the protagonist name as 'me', or just call him the 'protagonist'. On a side note, I always call him the protagonist.

●The town's Limited Express train that forms the setting on this story.

Once I decided to have this work written as a 'train-themed story', I began to think of towns, cities and the Limited Express that could be used for the story setting. The places I immediately thought of were the Annaka-Haruna Station and the Nagano Shinkansen."

However, I doubt any reader would know unless they are a local or a train enthusiast.

Let me explain...the Nagano Shinkansen starts off from Tokyo, and runs down the same track as the Joetsu Shinkansen, moving north to the Kanto flatlands. It'll then turn west at the Takasaki Station in Gunma, towards the Nagano Prefecture. Once it enters the Nagano Prefecture, it'll reach the renowned resort in Karuizawa. Annaka-Haruna is the station right before it.

It's a Shinkansen station...but the number of passengers per day was really less than 300, and there was basically no shopping facilities, so it does leave a deep impression. Right in front of the station is an empty land and parking lots, and further down are resorts and residences that were divided neatly and spread all around.

The Shinkansen only arrives once per hour, and there was no other train that would stop at this station, so this station was a 'secret realm station' that was not easily reached.

I knew of this station beforehand, and when conceptualizing, I really wanted to use it as the story setting. The protagonists would read the Shinkansen to Tokyo, and converse inside.

I had this idea for more than 3 years, but when I actually began to write, I found something really ridiculous, and that is--

"If I take the Shinkansen, I can make it to the 10am After Record on the day itself!"

That was the fact I realized. I could reach Tokyo within an hour and so...in that case, the basis of the story won't be formed, right!?

So, left with no choice, I abandoned the idea of Annaka-Haruna station, which I actually drove down to get material...

So I again checked the time schedules and transfers, and after some hard work, I found a potential place, the current train station and train in this work.

Anyone familiar with trains might have realized it. I deliberately chose not to write any specific terms, but I'm going to announce that the setting in this story is the town of Matsumoto in Nagano Prefecture.

The protagonists rode the Limited Express ride 'Super Azusa 28' operated by the JR East Japan Company, from Matsumoto station to Shinjuku.

I arranged for myself to spend a round trip riding this train for material gathering. I was busy with writing, so I could only spend one day gathering material.

First, I rode on the Super Azusa from Shinjuku to Matsumoto in the day, obtained some materials in the station and around there, spent about 2 hours or so, and returned to Tokyo. It was a tough trip. I spent more than 5 hours on the train.

But thanks to that, I managed to observe the layout of Matsumoto station (especially the location of the platform staircase), whether the nearby convenience stores sold 'sea salt flavor' potato chips, whether the local gift shop had horse sashimi chips, and all kinds of this.

This is an afterword where I can reveal the plot, so I can tell everyone that there's a huge 'lie' in this work, regarding this train.

I feel that anyone who rode on this train would realize--the Limited Express Super Azusa 28 isn't that empty!

When I went to have a seat, there were already a lot of people at Matsumoto station waiting for a ride, and the free seating was immediately filled up. After the 3rd station, I could no longer find any empty seats. Seated right beside me was a working class adult who probably weighed more than 100kg. It was squeezey.

As for whether the number of passengers decreased once I entered Tokyo, the fact is that it wasn't. This time, it was the commuters who boarded it for a short trip.

Furthermore, before reaching Shinjuku, the ones preparing to get off would be queuing at the exit or the aisles, so I think the situations in the story is hard to establish.

Once I was done gathering material, I began to think of potential places in my mind, but I couldn't think of any matching lines that would fit the timeframe. Thus, I had a discussion with my editor-in-charge, before we finally decided on using the idea of 'riding the Super Azusa 28 from Matsumoto station'. Though I knew it wasn't true, I still lied to have the plot match the concept.

If anyone intends to have a 'Pilgrimage', please be careful that the train is really crowded. Maybe someone else will hear you if you start talking about something serious on the train.

And finally--

●Strangle play.

This is the one point where I'll like to seriously remind everyone, please do not imitate what the heroine did this time.

Please do not have any ideas thinking of trying out 'being choked on the collarbone until you pass out' after reading this book.

Leaving aside those martial artists like judo practitioners who have 'choke holds'--it's really dangerous to deliberately have some experience a 'fainting game' where they pass out!

Humans won't die immediately (technically) even when the blood stops flowing...but when you pass out, there is a chance of you hitting your head, or not waking up ever again! Such games will easily lead to death (or I'll say, this isn't a 'game' anymore).

--I really wanted to write this down in the main text as knowledge for the protagonist. However, it didn't mesh with the story flow no matter what, so I deleted it.

You really can't do such a thing. Curiosity is the source of knowledge and experience, but it is fine to not do a lot of things. Of course, I never experienced that.

This novel I wrote is a fiction.

And so, this normal, spoiler-filled afterword ends.

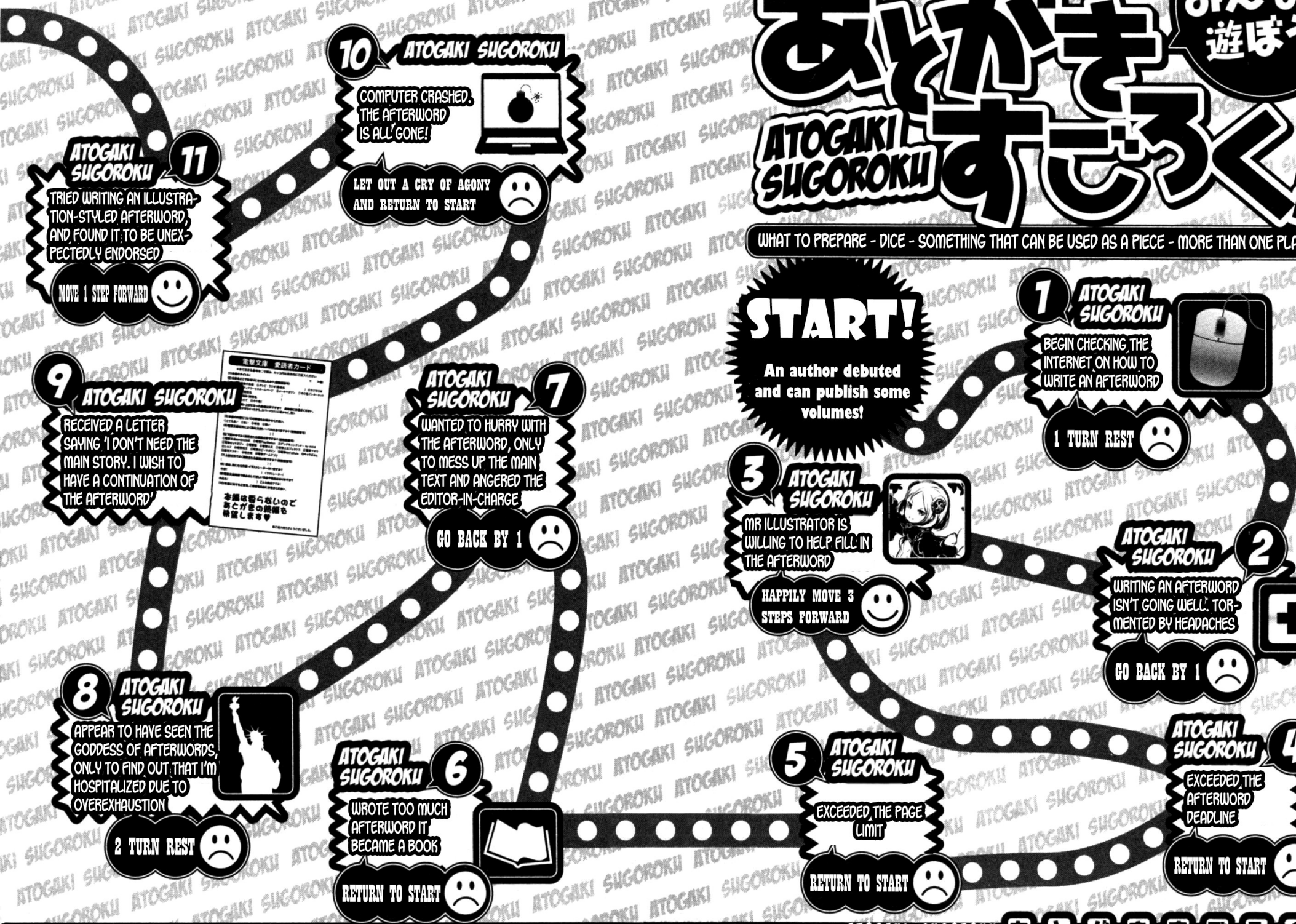
After flipping the pages, you may find some ordinary, spoiler-free afterword, so please continue to have a look.

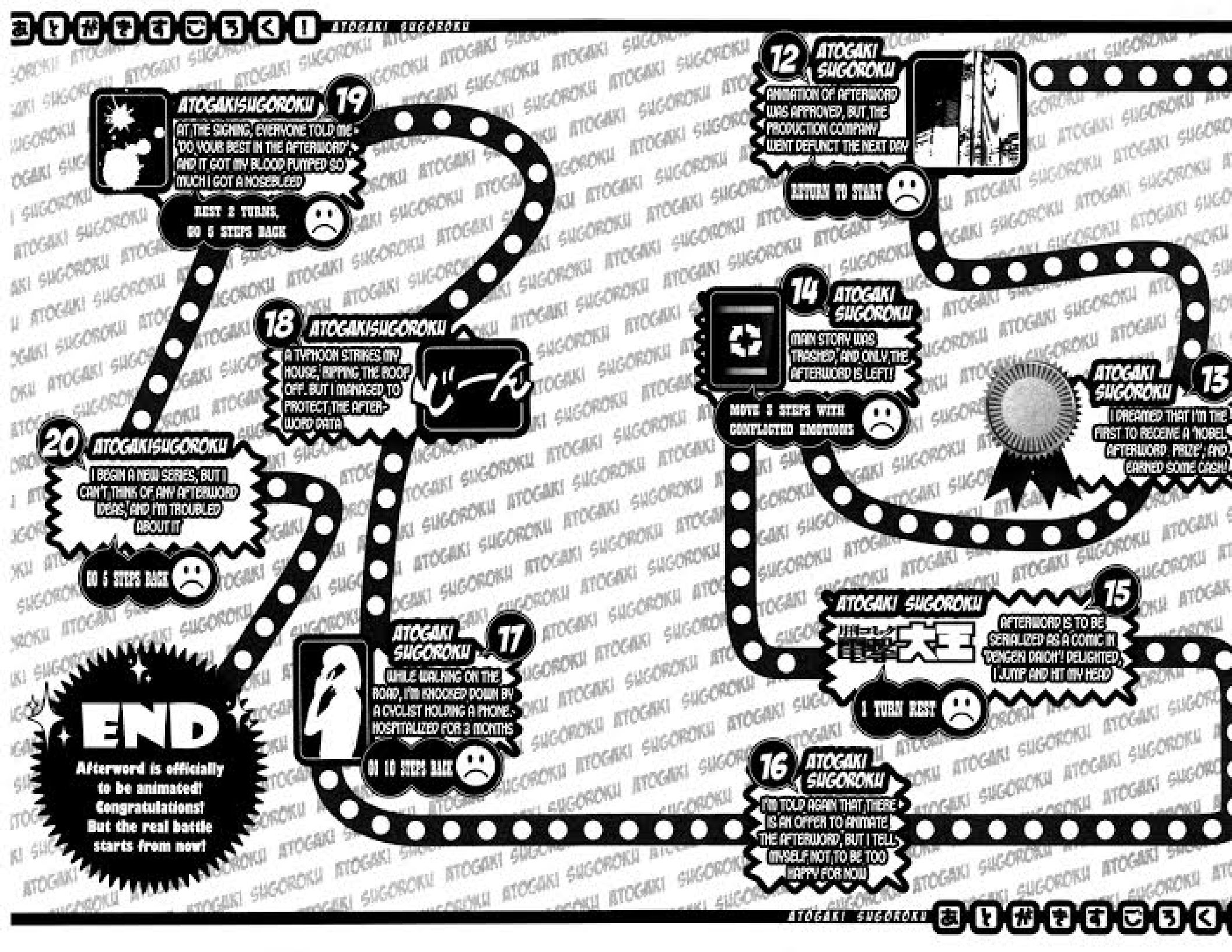
March 2014. Keiichi Sigsawa.

あ と が き す ご ろ く

みんな
遊ぼう

WHAT TO PREPARE - DICE - SOMETHING THAT CAN BE USED AS A PIECE - MORE THAN ONE PLAYER







大家好，我是黑星紅白。這次，
《身為男高中生兼當紅輕小說作家的我，
正被年紀比我小且從事聲優工作的
女同學掐住脖子2
——Time to Play—— (下)》的書名太長了，
沒地方寫感想!!